

HOW ARGUMENT
CHANGES HISTORY
AMARTYA SEN

HOW DOUG WILDER
IS CHANGING RICHMOND
JASON ZENGERLE

THE NEW REPUBLIC

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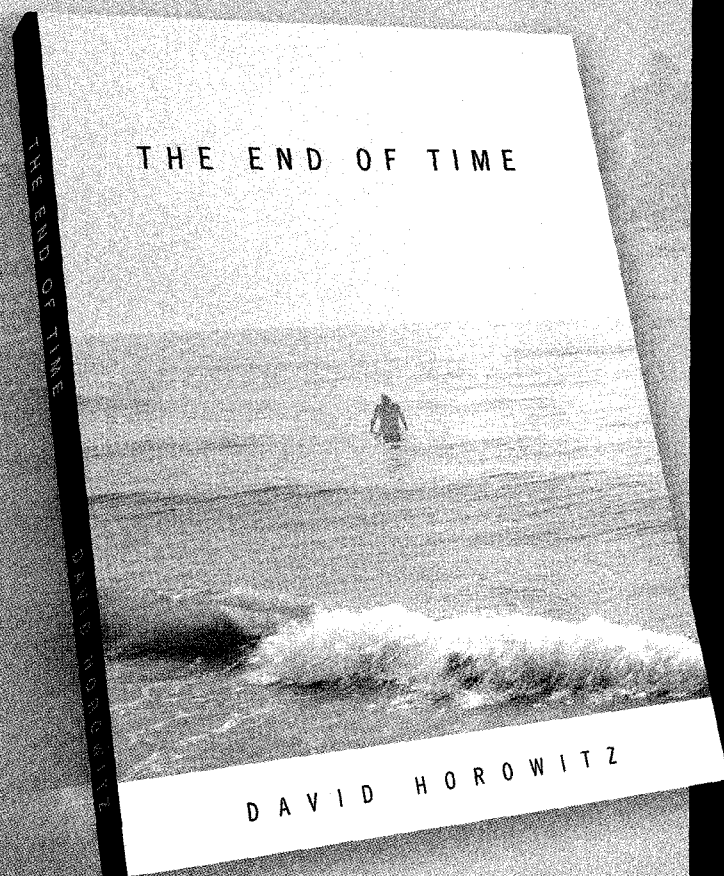


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THE
NEW REPUBLIC

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CORRESPONDENCE

RABBINICAL OVERSIGHT

FRANKLIN FOER DOESN'T CARE much for rabbis who take positions on the political right ("Torah Cover," June 20). He apparently doesn't even care much for rabbis like me, who do not publicly express political opinions of any kind, but whose brothers happen to take such positions. Foer wonders why my firm was hired in 1996 to consult on a project in the Mariana Islands (CNMI), when I was, "at the time, a Johannesburg rabbi." A more accurate description, but one that would not support Foer's conclusions, is that, at the time, I had a well-established business consulting firm that included an elite list of high-profile clients (a list that I provided for him, incidentally).

Relying on a single CNMI source who, by her own admission, has no familiarity with what we did, Foer reports ambiguous secondhand conclusions nine years after the fact. It is not as though there weren't firsthand accounts of what my firm and I did in the CNMI. Foer had a three-page 1997 memo from Nancy Gottfried, CNMI's former assistant attorney general, who also happened to be the person who drafted the labor reform legislation on which we consulted. In the memo, Gottfried details precisely what our firm did and states unequivocally, "I drafted [the legislation] based on work I had done with a task force set up by ABEI" (Applied Business Ethics, Inc., as our firm was then known). The memo goes on to detail the "series of workshops at the Department," run by ABEI. It also discusses at length the tangible results of our work and the legislation it inspired, including raising the minimum wage, ensuring overtime pay for workers, and providing housing assistance, to name just a few. Moreover, the extensive consulting that we did in the CNMI went well beyond the drafting of legislation and included the streamlining of the CNMI's government bureaucracy.

Foer also mischaracterized my current relationship with both Jack Abramoff and my brother, Daniel. I am not "furiously distancing" myself from Abramoff. On a personal level, I am pained by what he is going through; as far as his guilt, I leave that to the justice system to decide. Nor do I view my



brother as a liability. I view my brother as my brother, whose interests in politics are his business and have nothing to do with our relationship as siblings.

Foer snidely mocks the very notion that a rabbi can have anything worthwhile to contribute to the business world (apparently, that is the exclusive province of those with MBAs from Harvard and Wharton). Our firm, now based in Los Angeles and called Strategic Business Ethics, continues to win contracts all over the world with large and small companies that have no association with Abramoff. Foer has produced not one shred of evidence that I, or my firm, had any knowledge of the things Abramoff stands accused of. Yet he poses the loaded question: "What kind of rabbis . . . would provide guidance to a man like that? The Lapin brothers, that's who." One might just as reasonably ask the loaded question, "What kind of editors would provide guidance to a journalistic charlatan like Stephen Glass? The late Michael Kelly, Charles Lane, and the

staff of THE NEW REPUBLIC, that's who." Of course, that would ignore their long records and many accomplishments in the field of journalism. But why let the facts get in the way?

DAVID LAPIN
Chief Executive Officer
Strategic Business Ethics
Johannesburg, South Africa

FRANKLIN FOER RESPONDS:

David Lapin doesn't dispute that Abramoff convinced his clients, the CNMI government and Indian casinos, to give contracts to Lapin's ethics firm. With regard to the CNMI contract, I consulted several well-placed sources familiar with Lapin's work, some of whom declined to talk on the record. These sources convinced me that his work didn't justify the \$1.2 million contract—especially not for a small chain of islands with a paltry budget. Lapin points to a piece of reform legislation that he helped write. But this legislation proposed only minor alterations in the Islands' labor law—not enough to alleviate the abysmal conditions there, but possibly just enough to stave off meaningful federal reform. What's more, his legislation died a quiet death and never found its way into law.

Lapin's association with Abramoff is not incidental. Abramoff was paid millions by the CNMI to prevent any federal reforms that would damage the sweatshops there. It raises many questions: Why did Abramoff work so hard to secure Lapin a contract with the local government? If Lapin was so independent from the lobbyist, why do Abramoff's billing records suggest that Lapin spoke to him on a regular basis? And couldn't the CNMI government have found a consultant closer than South Africa? Finally, Lapin claims that a rabbinic perspec-

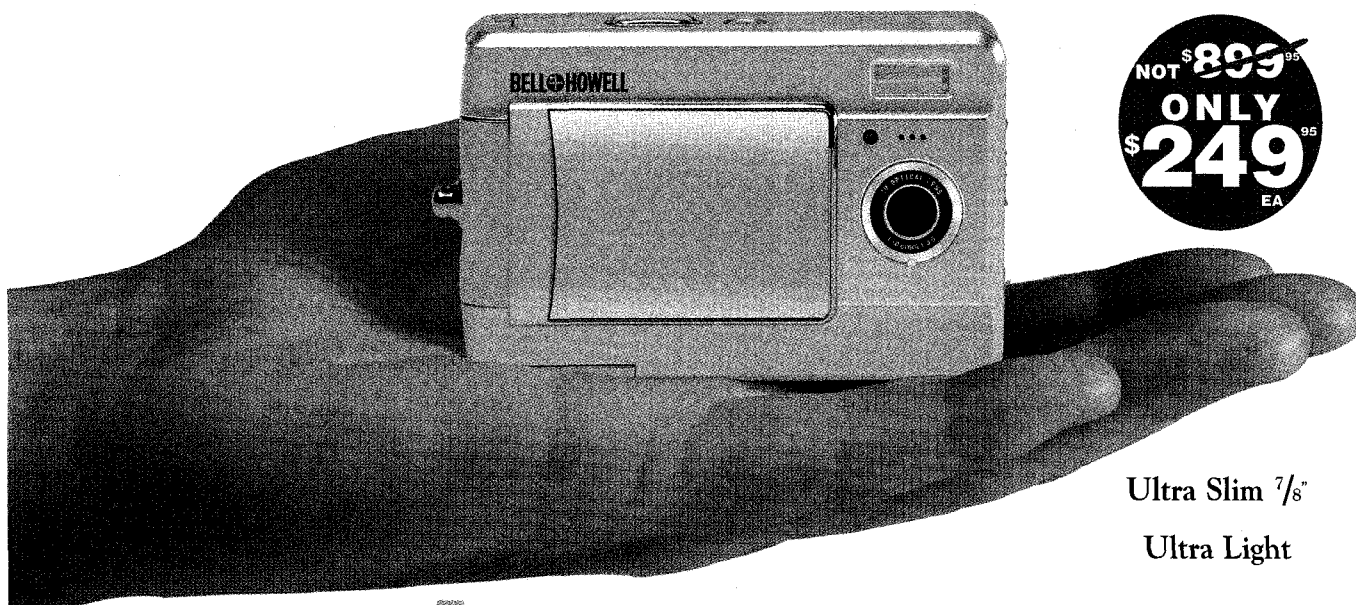
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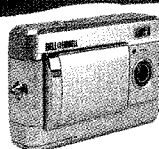
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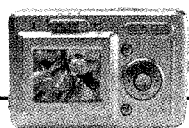
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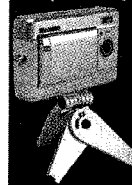
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Body Politics

A PIZZA DELIVERY CAR cruises down a leafy suburban street as a man in a black overcoat and a red power tie scampers after it, waving a piece of paper. "Trial lawyers used to only chase ambulances," explains a voice-over. "Now they're chasing restaurant deliveries to cash in on obesity."

Even if you haven't seen this advertisement, you may understand the message. Over the last few years, attorneys have been filing lawsuits on behalf of obese consumers, claiming that restaurants and the food industry should be held legally responsible for making people fat. The crusade seemed legally preposterous back in 2003, when a federal judge dismissed a lawsuit against McDonald's for its marketing of unhealthy foods and portion sizes. But, earlier this year, a federal appeals court reinstated part of the case, arguing that plaintiffs had the right to examine McDonald's records for evidence that the company misrepresented the nutritional value of its meals.

Polls suggest that the public is not yet ready to indict Ronald McDonald for the nation's health problems; in one 2003 survey, nearly 90 percent of respondents said they oppose obesity lawsuits against the food industry. But, with even more litigation in the works, the food industry and its allies aren't taking any chances. As *The New York Times* reported earlier this month, laws shielding the food industry from lawsuits accusing them of encouraging bad health have passed in 20 states and are under consideration in eleven more. "Those supporting obesity lawsuits are attempting to bypass the legislative process and regulate through litigation," explains the National Restaurant Association, which is lobbying intensely for these laws. "Congress and the appropriate regulatory bodies are the proper entities for addressing these matters, not judges and lawyers."

The restaurant group is right, of course: Lawsuits probably aren't the right response to America's unhealthy eating habits.

But how about taxes?

Silly though it may sound, there's a very sensible case for taxing unhealthy food—or, at the very least, two unhealthy substances within food. One is saturated fat, commonly found in beef and dairy products; the other is trans fatty acids, or



transfat, which the food industry adds to products during baking or frying. Both substances increase the level of "bad" cholesterol in the blood, which clogs arteries. Transfat seems to be a double whammy: It appears to reduce the level of good cholesterol, which counteracts the effects of bad cholesterol. Scientists agree that anything beyond minimal consumption of either increases the risk of heart attack and other circulatory problems, with no offsetting health benefits, even for otherwise healthy people. Economists agree that the treatment of these conditions—whether through prescription drugs to treat high blood pressure or angioplasty to open up clogged arteries—is very expensive.

The government has already taken some steps to reduce consumption of unhealthy fats—with some success. In 2003, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced it would require food manufacturers to include transfat content on their labels. The industry fought that requirement bitterly. But, with the regulations taking effect next year, manufacturers are busy removing transfat from their products, with companies like Frito-Lay leading the way. The FDA estimated that this change alone could save up to \$3 billion a year, on average, in health care costs over the next two decades.

By contrast, calls to impose taxes on unhealthy foods have raised mostly hackles—or worse. When Dr. Kelly Brownell, director of the Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders, introduced the notion in a *Times* op-ed a decade ago, Rush Limbaugh called him part of a "high-fat Gestapo" trying "to force the American people to act in the 'proper' way."

When you put it that way, the idea of a "Twinkie tax," as it has come to be known, really does sound absurdly paternalistic. If you want to load up on french fries, health risks and all, why is that the government's business? Unfortunately, fat consumption

really is the government's business in one, very literal, sense. As taxpayers, we all bear the burden of higher medical costs—either directly, by paying for Medicare and Medicaid, or indirectly, by subsidizing employer-based health insurance (which is tax deductible). So, when some people choose to eat poorly, we all end up bearing the financial burden for their decisions. A Twinkie tax would help rectify this, however modestly. Government wouldn't be scolding Americans about their choices. It would simply be asking them to confront the costs of those choices—namely, the future medical bills that fatty foods make more likely.

But the link between the Twinkie tax and health care funding must be explicit. Proponents like Brownell usually talk about using the revenue to finance health education campaigns or otherwise improve dietary habits—thus reinforcing the idea that they are, as one *National Review* writer put it, "busybodies pining to police your plate." Government could instead earmark the funds for programs like Medicaid (or, better yet, universal health insurance), which provide health benefits for the poor and uninsured. Among other things, this would help address a major flaw in the Twinkie tax: its inherently regressive nature, given that poor people spend a larger share of their income on food. (The tax could also exempt milk, which would probably make good medical sense as well, since pediatricians generally recommend that babies consume whole milk, which is high in saturated fat, until the age of two or three.)

Note how linking the Twinkie tax to health care expenditures turns the ideological calculus on its head. The most coherent argument about health care that conservatives make is that insurance, by its very nature, insulates people from medical bills to the point where they have little or no incentive for healthier behavior. Unfortunately, the right's preferred solution to this problem of "moral hazard" is simply to transfer more medical bills onto individuals—a shift that punishes not only those who have bad habits, but also those who have bad genes or simply bad luck. Taxing unhealthy foods, on the other hand, puts the financial consequences where they belong: On largely voluntary behaviors that lead to higher medical expenses. The Twinkie tax doesn't reduce personal responsibility, which is the usual complaint you hear about big government. It increases it.

JONATHAN COHN

Constitutional Crisis

GIVEN WHAT WE'VE learned in the past two years in Iraq—years filled with disappointment, tragedy, and carnage—it would be naïve to think the new constitution currently being drafted in Baghdad will resolve that country's deep sectarian and structural problems. After all, previous events hailed by the Bush administration as “turning points”—the June 28, 2004, transfer of “sovereignty” to a U.S.- and U.N.-anointed

interim government and then January's election—have been historic, but they have done little to stop the insurgency that threatens to tear the country apart. And, while Americans must hope that Iraq's new constitution, which is scheduled to be completed by August 15, does not thrust Iraq toward theocracy and civil war, both of these prospects now appear distinctly possible.

Leaked drafts of the constitution call for the application of Islamic edicts, not civil law, in matters related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. This will mean stripping many Iraqi women of rights that, ironically enough, they were afforded even under Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship. The idea that 1,800 American troops died so Iraqi women can enjoy the full blessings of religious medievalism ought to disturb the Bush administration and the American public.

More significant still is the constitution's inability to redress Iraq's sectarian divisions. Federalism, for instance, the prerequisite for Kurdish participation in Iraq—and increasingly a demand of oil-rich Shia provinces as well—is viewed by Sunnis as a betrayal. “The voices that call for federalism are not those of loyal people,” Sheik Mahmoud Al Sumaidie instructed from an influential Sunni mosque on Friday. “The patriots are against dividing the country, and I call on them to fight for maintaining a united Iraq.”

We recognize, of course, that the future of Iraq is now largely in Iraqi hands. And we hope that the Iraqis, in recognizing this, will exhibit the sort of statesmanship that has so frequently eluded the Middle East in the past. But the writing of Iraq's constitution also represents perhaps America's last best chance to shape Iraq's future. The administration must bring to bear all the leverage that billions in reconstruction funding and the presence of the 138,000 American troops stationed in Iraq can provide. We must do everything possible to make sure this new constitution does not leave Iraqi democracy stillborn.

Belatedly, the administration seems to have abandoned its previous hands-off approach, and it is now urgently trying to steer the Iraqi framers toward a more liberal and pluralistic outcome. The new American ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, told *The New York Times* this week that he intends to tell each one of the religious and ethnic groups drafting the constitution that it must be willing to “accept less than its maximum aspirations.” Of course, the amount of influence Khalilzad can exert on a sovereign Iraqi process is limited. But it is important that he is trying nonetheless.

Khalilzad should also implore Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari to abandon efforts by those in his administration, including former Pentagon favorite and now-Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Chalabi, to persecute Sunnis by denying them jobs in the government bureaucracy simply because of past low-level affiliation with Saddam's Baath party. Iraq needs reconciliation, not vengeance.

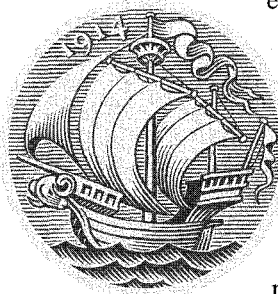
At the same time, the United States must redouble its efforts at back-channel negotiations with Sunni insurgents, in the hopes—even at this late date—of drawing them into the political process. This is the only real hope of ending the violence that has killed so many Iraqis and lessening the chances of a civil war that might kill many more.

We have long opposed a U.S. departure from Iraq before it has a military capable of defending its fledgling government. And we still do today. But, if it becomes clear that the only way to win Sunni participation is to begin discussions about a withdrawal timetable, the United States must at least be open to that discussion—particularly as

even the Shia-led Iraqi government has now called for a swift reduction of U.S. troops. If such a timetable is set, it becomes all the more important that the United States do everything it can to train capable Iraqi security forces in the interim—a mission poorly served by the

administration's constant resort to inflated reports of the number and abilities of Iraqi trainees.

American mistakes and poor judgment over the past two years are part of the reason this constitution is being drafted under fire. Let's hope we do better in the next—critical—two weeks. ■



NOTEBOOK

BENEDICT IGNORES THE JEWS... DEMS REFUSE TO QUESTION HUGHES

LA VIDA LOCA

WE HOLD A LOT OF THINGS AGAINST Ricky Martin. The brief but intense faux-Latin pop crossover in 1999, for one thing. The every-half-hour saturation of his throbbing anthem "The Cup of Life" during George W. Bush's rallies late into the 2000 campaign, for another. We've breathed easier during the last several years, however, content in the knowledge that Martin's 15 minutes are long past and that the ex-Menudo star is done shaking his bon-bon anywhere near a place we couldn't avoid seeing it.

Lately, though, the onset of obscurity has chafed Ricky. And, while most faded pop sensations desperate for a second act are content to be filmed eating cockroaches, attending college, or crash-dieting, Martin has chosen a more high-minded path: cultural ambassador for Arab youth. Granted, a washed-up 33-year-old Puerto Rican metrosexual heartthrob is hardly an obvious choice to speak for millions of young and disaffected Arabs. But give him credit for tenacity. "I will become a spokesperson if you allow me to, a spokesperson on your behalf," Martin promised a youth conference in Amman, Jordan, this week. "I will defend you and try to get rid of any stereotypes"—namely, that he was addressing a gathering of would-be terrorists. Immediately demonstrating his cultural sensitivity, Martin draped around his shoulders a kaffiyeh bearing the Arabic inscription JERUSALEM IS OURS. To the unjustly maligned Arab kids in attendance, our advice is to find an A-list celebrity. To any young would-be terrorists, we extend our congratulations: You've managed, for the first time, to turn Ricky Martin, an idiot, into a useful idiot.

PAPAL FALLIBILITY

FROM HIS ALPINE RETREAT IN THE Valle d'Aosta, Italy, Pope Benedict XVI, the former Cardinal Ratzinger, has asked God to stop the "murderous band"



Ricky Martin

who have perpetrated the recent "abhorrent terrorist attacks" in Egypt, Great Britain, Turkey, and Iraq. Frankly, we're not ready to leave these matters to the almighty Lord alone. And we are also surprised that the pontiff blithely omitted Israel from the list of terrorism's targets, since terrorism takes aim at Israelis literally every day. We had expected more from the Vicar of Christ, since, on the assumption of his papacy, he pledged to place particular importance on the Church's relationship with the Jewish people. (There is also the awkward fact that the Holy Father had once been a member of the *Hitlerjugend*.)

So why did the Pope not also pray that terrorism be stopped against the Jewish state and the Jewish nation? One can only speculate. But the most reasonable explanation remains an ugly one: Vatican politics still keeps the Pope from asking for God's protection of the Jews. And, by the way, speaking of ugly incidents: This week in Geneva, the U.N.

Sub-Commission on Human Rights simply refused to take up the matter of religiously motivated terrorism—with assembled diplomats from, you can be sure, countries immensely sensitive to the dignity of peoples—brazenly but successfully shouting down the proponents of a discussion.

VERY RELIABLE SOURCES

SOMETIMES THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT seems to be in love with its credibility gap. How else to explain its recent fusillades of absurdity about Iraq? Last week's delayed "progress" report to Congress gleefully reported that over 171,000 Iraqi security forces have been "trained and equipped." But it turns out only three of 107 Iraqi battalions are able to fight the insurgency without the aid of U.S. troops—which is what you'd be forgiven for thinking "trained and equipped" means. (How do those Iraqi forces feel about their American patrons? "I myself hate them," Brigadier General Majeed Farraji, chief of the Iraqi police's major crimes unit, told the *Los Angeles Times*.)

But perhaps the most farcical descent into dishonesty came in the form of a press release. After a car bomb planted near a Baghdad police station killed dozens of Iraqis on Sunday, the military circulated a gung-ho quote attributed to an anonymous Iraqi damning the attackers: "The terrorists are attacking the infrastructure, the ISF, and all of Iraq. They are enemies of humanity, without religion or any sort of ethics. They have attacked my community today, and I will now take the fight to the terrorists." Curious that an Iraqi would sound so much like President Bush, or that he would use an English military acronym like ISF (as in "Iraqi security forces"). As it turns out, there's a simple explanation: He probably doesn't exist. On July 13, after another deadly bombing, the military circulated the exact

same quote, only with “the children” substituted for “the ISF.” A spokesman for the Third Infantry Division blamed an “administrative error”—presumably the error of making stuff up. Next time the military wants to lie to the public, it should stick to releasing bogus statistics. More plausible deniability that way.

MISSING IN ACTION

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY—THAT RATHER abstract concept of winning hearts and minds, particularly in the Muslim world, by projecting American values abroad—has been much discussed on Capitol Hill of late, especially by members of the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee. During Condoleezza Rice’s confirmation hearings in January, for example, Ranking Member Joseph Biden responded to the future secretary of state’s testimony by asking repeatedly, “What’s the plan? What are we going to do?” and concluding that he “didn’t hear a thing, other than the hortatory assertions that ‘we want to do this.’”

Karen Hughes’s testimony before the Committee last week probably would have exasperated the senator and his colleagues, too—if they had bothered to show up for it. But, rather than jump at the chance to question the president’s nominee to be the new undersecretary of state for public diplomacy, the Com-

mittee’s Democrats didn’t even attend. (Biden did meet Hughes privately the day before.) The Republican showing wasn’t much better, with only two Committee members on hand to shower Hughes with praise.

Hughes was thus free to offer hortatory assertions about “the goodness and decency and compassion of the American people” and what she called the “four E’s”: engagement, exchanges, education, and empowerment. Hughes also emphasized the need for dialogue with the rest of the world and pledged to “mobilize our government to do more listening.” Indeed, she might start with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. ■

TNR.commentary

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DUMB LUCK: If the “person familiar” with Ari Fleischer’s testimony before the PlameGate grand jury can be believed, then the former White House spokesman, at least according to a July 27 *New York Times* article, looks to be in the clear.

This, to me at least, comes as very depressing news. I know liberals are supposed to be rooting for Karl Rove to be taken down by Patrick Fitzgerald’s investigation, but the guy I wanted to see done in by PlameGate was Fleischer. Let me explain: For all of Rove’s dastardly deeds, even his harshest critics have to concede that he’s smart. Liberals don’t call him a genius (albeit an evil one) for nothing. But Fleischer seems to be an absolute doofus, who, thanks to his time in the White House, is now rich and famous. Now, there are some people out there, like my colleague Jonathan Chait, who saw a peculiar brand of genius in Fleischer’s daily performances in the White House briefing room—a rare ability never to give a straight answer. But what Chait sees as malevolent brilliance, I see as malevolent buffoonery. To the Bush administration, Fleischer was a useful idiot.

All of which, in some ways, should make him a sympathetic figure. But it doesn’t, because, ever since leaving

the White House, Fleischer has cashed in on his time there. He has written a memoir about his experience and gone on the lecture circuit, where, for reportedly up to \$50,000 a speech, he’ll discourse on “A Day in the Life of a White House Press Secretary” or “America and Israel: The Path to Stability in the Middle East.” And, last year, he signed up with the sports marketing agency IMG, which will pitch his p.r. skills to professional athletes, coaches, teams, and leagues. Already, Major League Baseball’s commissioner has hired Fleischer to help him deal with the steroid scandal fallout.

The upshot has been a cushy post-White House life for Fleischer. He lives in the affluent New York City suburb of Pound Ridge, in a house that, according to the *Times*, is “tucked behind a secured fence and a thicket of shrubbery.” I’m not usually one to fault people for their worldly successes, but, when it’s as undeserved as Fleischer’s, it’s hard not to get a little steamed.

The only thing I can think of that would make his undeservedly cushy life more bearable would be if the thing that gave it to him—his accidental turn as White House press secretary—came back to bite him in the ass. Yes, liberals can dream about taking down Karl Rove, but meritocrats know that Ari Fleischer is the more deserving target.

—Jason Zengerle

DON’T BLAME THE WHITE HOUSE, BLAME ROBERTS: *The Boston Globe* says conservatives are upset with the White House for trying to put distance between John Roberts and the Federalist Society, the influential conservative legal organization. As the *Globe* reported on July 26:

In conference calls plotting strategy for his nomination, conservatives spoke angrily yesterday about the White House’s decision to disassociate Roberts from the group. Many conservatives said the society should not be treated like a pariah, and questioned what would happen if the next Supreme Court nominee is a member.

Conservatives think the White House approach to the Federalist Society question is delegitimizing the organization. Problem is, the attempt to put distance between Roberts and his fellow Federalists doesn’t originate with White House spinners. It originates with Roberts himself. According to the July 25 *Washington Post*:

These [i.e., the difference between being a member of the Federalist Society and simply attending society events and sitting on a society steering committee] may seem like fine distinctions, but Roberts has insisted on them. In 2001, after he was nominated by

President Bush for the seat he currently holds on the court of appeals, Roberts spoke to *Post* reporter James V. Grimaldi and asked him to correct an item Grimaldi had written that described Roberts as a member of the Federalist Society. In a subsequent column, Grimaldi wrote that Roberts “is not and never has been a member of the Federalist Society, as previously reported in this column.”

My hunch is that the White House doesn’t particularly care whether or not Roberts is a member of the Federalist Society. What they do care about is their man looking like a Clintonian definition-parser, someone so ambitious and calculating he worried that the taint of membership in a conservative organization might damage his career prospects, but who nonetheless wanted the benefits of rubbing elbows with influential conservatives. That’s the impression Roberts leaves with his pattern of associating himself with the Federalist Society while refusing to identify himself as a member. The White House response, wisely, has been to try to conceal this slightly dubious personality tic by pretending the case is much more trivial and clear-cut than it actually is.

—Noam Scheiber

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The dangers of tolerance. Clerical Error

BY PETER BERGEN
AND PAUL CRUICKSHANK

IT HAS BECOME trite to say that, on September 11, 2001, Americans realized anew that it was important to pay attention to what was happening on distant shores, that developments taking place half a world away could suddenly and devastatingly threaten the lives of people here at home. This realization was important, but it cemented a view of Islamist terrorism as an external threat. The West—the United States and Europe—was the target of this terrorism, but not its source, which was to be found elsewhere, in some foreign land, where it was cooked up under the spiritual tutelage of the radical Islamist clerics of Pakistan or Saudi Arabia.

One lasting legacy of the July 7 terrorist attacks in London may be the exploding of this myth. Britons now realize that Islamist terrorism can be homegrown. What's more, the attacks have focused attention on the extent to which Great Britain has become an exporter of Islamic terrorism in recent years, by providing refuge to Islamist radicals from throughout the Middle East. British-based radicals have taken advantage of the country's tradition of free expression to encourage young Muslims to join Osama bin Laden's jihad, providing the spiritual inspiration—and, in several cases, the manpower—for attacks and attempted attacks, not only in Europe and the United States, but back in the Middle East, as well.

Three clerics residing in Britain have been particularly critical to the support of terrorism worldwide: Sheik Omar Bakri Mohammed, Abu Hamza Al Masri, and Abu Qatada. In fact, German law enforcement documents we recently obtained indicate that Abu Qatada has provided much of the spiritual inspiration for Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, the most effective Iraqi insurgent leader. A look at the history of these three militants in Britain demonstrates the folly of Britain's former tolerance of such preachers and the need for better vigilance in the future.

'HE [OSAMA BIN LADEN] is showing that he can use British Muslims, who are living on your own doorstep, to harm you. He doesn't have to bring people all the way from Medina and Saudi Arabia to fly over here. ... If this attack was Al Qaeda, then I think it can be considered a great success for them." That's Sheik Omar Bakri Mohammed, discussing the recent London bombings over dinner last week. Since the July 7 attacks, Bakri has been on a whirlwind tour of London's TV studios, blaming Tony Blair and his Iraq

policy—as well as the British public—for provoking the attacks. As a result, the Syrian-born Bakri has become perhaps the most hated man in Britain. His face has been plastered on the front pages of many British newspapers, including *The Sun*, which ran its story under the headline, "SEND HIM BAK." "The main issue is, you are killing Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq," he told us. "Hands off Muslim lands. ... You don't want to live in the cemetery. Come out of the cemetery. Come out of Iraq."

Bakri was granted asylum in Britain in 1986 after being expelled from Saudi Arabia for extremism. In Britain, he set up Hizb-ut-Tahir, a fundamentalist organization described by the British Home Office as "extremist." Hizb-ut-Tahir wants to take power somewhere in the Muslim world to create an Islamic state from which to spread its strict interpretation of Islam. By the mid-'90s, Hizb-ut-Tahir had been banned on Britain's campuses and thrown out of most British mosques. But, in 1996, Bakri launched an even more militant organization, Al Muhajiroun ("the Emigrants"), a nod to the Prophet Mohammed's supporters, who emigrated from Mecca to Medina in the seventh century.

We first came across an Al Muhajiroun meeting in April 2000. Tucked tightly into a community hall in Walthamstow, East London, 200 men and—unusual among such organizations—100 women were raptly listening to a conference titled "Osama bin Laden and Terrorism." "We recognize the leadership of Osama bin Laden," Bakri told the gathering. On the walls, posters announced JEWISH OCCUPIERS: KILL THEM WHEN YOU SEE THEM, while a self-described military adviser to the group pointed out that privately sponsored military training in the United Kingdom was not a crime.

But it was only after September 11 that Al Muhajiroun began to draw significant media attention. Shoe-bomber Richard Reid was found to have attended some of its meetings. Bakri later hit the headlines when he tried to organize a conference to celebrate the "Magnificent 19," a reference to the 19 September 11 hijackers. On April 30, 2003, two Britons of Pakistani descent attacked a nightclub in Tel Aviv, killing three. One of the attackers, Asif Mohammed Hanif—who appears to hold the distinction of being Britain's first suicide bomber—used to hang out at Bakri's offices. Omar Khan Sharif, who failed to detonate his device and was found dead in the Mediterranean Sea a few days later, also attended several Al Muhajiroun meetings. After the Tel Aviv attack, Bakri told *The Daily Telegraph*, "I knew Sharif very well, and he used to attend regularly at my sessions. He was my brother, and I am very proud of him and any Muslim who will do the same as him." Bakri told us that Sharif had asked about the Islamic justification for suicide bombing, but denied any role in the attack.

Bakri's name is also linked to a bomb plot broken up by

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British police in March 2004. Five British Pakistanis are awaiting trial for planning to use half a ton of ammonium nitrate, which they had been storing near Heathrow Airport, to hit targets in the United Kingdom. Several of the plotters, including a brilliant young cricketer, Omar Khyam, attended Bakri's meetings. Khyam's uncle told an interviewer: "Omar was a normal kid until Al Muhajiroun started preaching their hatred 'round here."

Bakri told us that, while he had known some of those involved in the ammonium nitrate plot, they had cut their ties with Al Muhajiroun, finding his group "too moderate." They did not believe, for instance, in Bakri's "Covenant of Security." This novel construct, for which Bakri attributes Koranic justification, proscribes Muslims living in Britain from waging jihad there. Bakri's Covenant of Security was never more than a wafer-thin lid on the pressure-cooker atmosphere his inflammatory preaching had created. And, in 2004, during a tirade outside the U.S. Embassy against abuses at Abu Ghraib, Bakri declared the Covenant dead. Bakri also told *Publica*, a Portuguese magazine, that a "very well-organized" group in London "has a great appeal for young Muslims. ... I know that they are ready to launch a big operation." Alarming, Bakri told us that he thought there were more attacks to come. Even he expressed concern at the "jihadist tendencies" of some of his former followers who now "insult" him for not directly urging attacks on Great Britain and who "really dream, day and night, to be like Abu Musab Zarqawi."

IF BAKRI IS a cheerleader for bin Laden's jihad, Abu Hamza has been something of a recruiter. It seems as if no self-respecting jihadist coming through London passed up the opportunity to attend the Finsbury Park Mosque, where Abu Hamza, who became a British citizen through marriage, preached. Zacarias Moussaoui, the twentieth September 11 hijacker, was a frequent visitor to the mosque, as were Richard Reid and Nizar Trabelsi, a Tunisian former professional soccer player who was instructed by bin Laden to blow up a NATO base in Belgium in the fall of 2001. (Trabelsi is now serving a ten-year sentence in Belgium.) Regulars at Finsbury Park also included Abu Doha, an Algerian who once ran Al Qaeda's Khaldan training camp in Afghanistan. Abu Doha is now in British custody, implicated in a plot to blow up Los Angeles International Airport in 2000.

By January 2003, Hamza's praise of bin Laden and the September 11 attacks had become too much for the British authorities, who prevented him from continuing to preach at the Finsbury Park Mosque. But, until his eventual arrest in May 2004, Hamza continued to pour out invective every Friday on the streets outside the mosque. Hamza's arrest came as the result of an U.S. extradition request that seems to have embarrassed British authorities into pressing their own charges against the cleric, which include the solicitation of the murder of non-Muslims and the incitement of racial hatred. It turns out that Hamza could have been

prosecuted years earlier; only one of the charges against him required the tougher legislation enacted after September 11 by the United Kingdom's 2001 Terrorism Act.

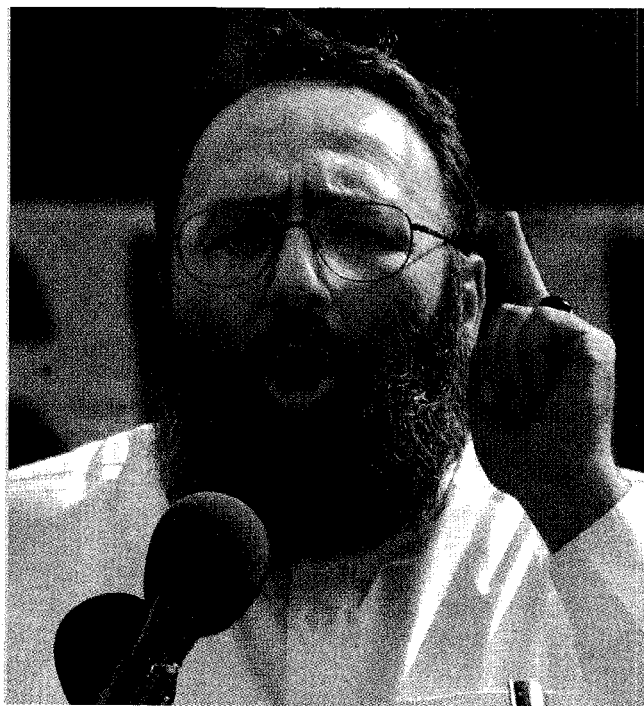
Hamza's trial began just one day before the July 7 attacks, and it has since emerged that Hamza had close ties with an individual suspected of playing an important role in that operation, Haroon Rashid Aswat. Aswat is originally from Dewsbury, in northern England, where three of the bombers lived, and he is suspected of visiting the bombers in the weeks before the attacks.

There is a strong U.S. connection here, too. In late November 1999, Abu Hamza sent Aswat to Oregon to scout out a piece of land that African American jihadist James Ujaama was proposing as a training camp. In an intercepted fax to Hamza, Ujaama compared the swath of land to Afghanistan and said that guns and ammunition could be stored in bunkers. If it is proved that Hamza's protégé did in fact play a key role in the London attacks, British authorities will surely regret their failure to act earlier to curb Hamza's encouragement of the London jihadists.

IN CONTRAST TO Bakri and Hamza—both of whom seem to revel in the publicity their calls to jihad garner—the Jordanian cleric Abu Qatada, who first arrived in London claiming asylum in 1993, is little-known to the British public. He is, however, a much more dangerous figure. Abu Qatada is the mentor and spiritual authority for many militant jihadists, including the notorious Iraqi insurgent leader Abu Musab Al Zarqawi.

We have obtained documents from German law enforce-

Omar Bakri Muhammed, whose devotees included Richard Reid and Asif Mohammed Hanif, addresses supporters at Trafalgar Square in 2002.



ment that explain Qatada's central role in Zarqawi's network. This information came both from the interrogation of Shadi Abdallah, a Jordanian member of Zarqawi's group arrested in Germany in April 2002, as well as German wiretaps of Zarqawi's calls to his supporters. Abdallah told his interrogators that, the same month he was arrested, Zarqawi had instructed his group to start producing explosives for an attack on Jewish institutions in Germany. Abdallah also revealed Abu Qatada's role in blessing such an operation to his interrogators: "For the religious legitimization of an attack ... this was primarily the responsibility of Abu Qatada, not of Muhannad [an alias for Zarqawi]. ... There is a person above Muhannad in England called Abu Qatada."

Abu Qatada's central role as the spiritual guide of European jihadists was highlighted by the fact that the members of the Spanish cell who killed 191 Madrid commuters on March 11, 2004, tried to reach him three times by phone before they blew themselves up a couple of weeks after the Madrid attacks. Indeed, the Spanish judge who indicted Abu Qatada characterizes him in the indictment as "the recognized spiritual leader of numerous extremist groups."

Abu Qatada was detained by British authorities in October 2002. An earlier raid on Qatada's house turned up \$296,000 in U.K. and foreign currency, which seemingly substantiates charges in the Spanish indictment that Qatada played a role in financing a number of militant groups. Despite the fact that the judge in Qatada's case concluded that he was "at the centre in the United Kingdom of terrorist activities associated with Al Qa'ida," in January 2005, the House of Lords, the highest court of appeal in Britain, forced the government to release Qatada on the grounds that holding non-British citizens without trial was discriminatory under the laws of the European Union. For the moment, Qatada is under house arrest, but, as a British judge previously ruled, "No conditions, whether involving [electronic] tagging and the use of phones, could remove the danger that this [individual] represents."

ONLY NOW DOES the British government seem to be getting serious about dealing with the radical clerics that it tolerated for too long. For instance, since the July 7 attacks, British officials have cut a deal with Jordan that opens the way for Abu Qatada to be expelled to his native country, provided that he does not face torture or the death penalty. And, last week, British Home Secretary Charles Clarke outlined a set of measures that would outlaw "preaching, running a Web site or writing articles which are intended to foment or provoke terrorism." This should prevent future Bakris and Abu Hamzas from inciting impressionable young Muslim men to commit terrorist acts.

In addition, the British should institute a policy of carefully vetting clerics who are planning to settle in the United Kingdom, and they might also consider adopting a plan, already in place in France, that allows only licensed clerics to preach. We know from *Understanding Terror Networks*, an authoritative

2004 study of 172 jihadist terrorists from around the world by former CIA officer Marc Sageman, that half of the terrorists in his sample attended the same ten religious institutions. Indeed, six of those institutions are in Europe. The importance of that finding was further underlined as it emerged at press time that several members of both the July 7 and the July 21 bombing missions worshiped at, or passed through, Hamza's Finsbury Park Mosque, including Mohammed Siddique Khan, the suspected leader of the July 7 operation. The clear inference from all this is that, at an early stage, prosecuting—or shaming into silence—preachers like Bakri, Abu Hamza, and Abu Qatada is critical to stem the spread of the militant Islamist ideology that glorifies terrorism. ■

Condi's blurred vision. Word Choice

BY MARTIN PERETZ

C ONDOLEEZZA RICE RUSHED to Jerusalem and Ramallah on what she is likely to have imagined as a rescue mission for the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. If that was truly her motive, she need not have bothered. Ariel Sharon has mainstream Israel solidly behind him, and a parliamentary majority has voted for withdrawal no less than four times. Sharon long ago determined that Gaza was a dead end for the country, what with the particularly daunting demographic ratio (1.3 million Arabs to 9,000 Jews, this number itself being the biggest failure of the settler movement) and the human price the army would have to pay to defend an agrarian idyll that some confused with biblical prophecy and national destiny. Israel would depart whatever the circumstances. Still, even if the reason for her panic was misplaced, Rice's sudden presence was certainly needed if only to prop up the designated receiving end of the disengagement equation. After all, Palestinians were shooting one another on the streets of Gaza, where Hamas has staggering gun-toting superiority. But it is doubtful that her coyly supportive appearance in the *Muqata*, Yasir Arafat's old haunts far from the historic squalor of the Strip, will do the trick for Mahmoud Abbas for long.

It is true that much of diplomacy is stage drama, which is why it doesn't change realities. In any case, the secretary of state's description of what was happening on Palestinian ground was so patently not true that almost no one, neither in Israel nor in long-emerging Palestine, could possibly believe that what she said was anything other than fantasy. Maybe the European Union will take Rice's pleasing appraisal of the behavior of the Palestinian Authority as an accurate assessment, but EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana's con-

stituents do not have a record of reliable judgment on these matters. Moreover, the recent eruption of Islamic terrorism in London, and even Jacques Chirac's troubles at home, seem somehow to have alerted much of Europe to the perils of misunderstanding such matters of life and death.

SO, DESPITE WHAT the American secretary of state said on Saturday in praise of the Abbas government's efforts at establishing the rule of law in the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinians see that she was not describing their reality. They know that Jews within and just beyond Gaza are targeted by rockets, mortar shells, and simple bullets every day. Sometimes these kill, sometimes they only maim or injure (and often they are so off the mark to make it all a bit comical). And an increasing number of suicide bombers are being stopped by Israeli security forces. But, just before Rice took a break from the tiresome Israeli and Palestinian positioning—and went to Beirut to buck up the newly formed Lebanese government (which, for the first time in history, reserved a cabinet position for Hezbollah, even as the United Nations insists that it disarm)—two events occurred within hours of each other that illuminate the moral swill that defines the Abbas moment in Palestinian history.

First, an innocent Palestinian child was murdered and a fantastic tale was spun around the atrocity. The fact was that a 12-year-old boy was stabbed several times in one of those family honor feuds that so elevate Palestinian society. But family members and PA authorities, including the Ministry of the Interior in official statements, blamed the killing on Jewish settlers. Second, rockets aimed at a Gaza Jewish settlement fell far short of their target and killed a 10-year-old Palestinian boy in the Khan Yunis slum instead. No doubt, the hapless youngster has by now been proclaimed a martyr. These are the usual compensations in the Arab world for friendly fire.

On Saturday, after Rice had finished her visit with Abbas in Ramallah, another atrocity occurred in Gaza. A Jerusalem couple was killed on their way back from visiting a family preparing to leave its home in Gush Katif. Others in their party were wounded. Who were the perpetrators of these crimes? Well, yes, members of Islamic Jihad were involved. But primary credit in Gaza was taken by, and given to, the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade of Fatah, Abbas's organization. So this was not a good weekend for Rice to discover so many omens of peace. Were it not for the Sharm El Sheik enormity (attributed to the Zionists on Al Jazeera and even in the Egyptian press), the biggest news would have been the arrest in Israel of an 18-year-old Gaza youth—with five kilograms of explosives in his body belt—on his way with an accomplice, arrested in mixed Arab-Jewish Jaffa, to downtown Tel Aviv, for which he planned a lethal extravaganza. It turns out that he, too, is not one of the frenzied pious, just a member of Abbas's old establishment white-pita Fatah militia. And this is barely 72 hours in the annals of Israel's terrorism, much of it is so

quotidian that it doesn't even make the evening news.

ISRAEL KNOWS THAT it will have to live with these failures that are less of skill than of will. And Sharon is obviously eager not to contradict the architect of U.S. foreign policy upon whom he and his entire country rely. But something interesting has now happened in Israeli society: The extremes have collapsed. At one end, the peace movement has more or less expired, a decline that has been in process ever since Arafat refused Bill Clinton's sweetheart deal for just about everything in the last days of his presidency. The fact is that almost no one in Israeli politics—except for the dreamful Shimon Peres, who is certain that he already lives in the “new Middle East”—talks anymore about a comprehensive peace settlement with the Palestinians. And, at the other end, the territorialist millennium is also coming to a close. The pathetic failure of last week's demonstrations against the government's insistence on leaving Gaza deflated, in two or three days, the Greater Israel movement of some three decades. Nearly everybody, even on the Israeli far right, now grasps that Israel cannot sit on the Arabs of the West Bank forever. So Israel will decide where the lines will be drawn, and it will cut as little as possible into densely populated Arab regions of a territorially contiguous cartography. Concentrated Arab population centers in Israel that abut the new Palestinian state may be easily transferred from one national jurisdiction to another, with compensation from the Israeli social system following their present recipients for decades and beyond. This is not “population transfer,” it is pragmatism: the ceding of what are actually Palestinian towns cleaving to Palestine.

Still, Rice's remarks about the day after the Gaza disengagement demonstrate that she has hardly grasped the new realities. Nothing in the experience of Gaza or the West Bank should have permitted her to move blithely into talking about the U.S. commitment to “the connectivity” of the two areas. Under any design at the present moment, this would inevitably be a link between two lively centers of terrorism. The Palestinian Authority has, for years, been promising to smother the terrorist ranks in would-be Palestine; but whatever progress has been made in this regard is the work not of Palestinians, but of Israelis and their targeted assassinations, checkpoints, and defensive barriers, some of which are admittedly kind of ugly. Rice hopes that Gaza “cannot be a sealed or isolated area, with the Palestinian people closed in.” So the demand has grown already—supported by the secretary—that a modern port be built in Gaza and the Gaza airport reopened. But who will guarantee that these facelifts will not quickly turn out to be transfer points for deadly weapons? Shall we, perhaps, devolve this responsibility on the United Nations? Rice's vision is ingenuous and premature. The Palestinians have a history as true pioneers in the great terrorist bane of our times, and they are still stars in the terrorist firmament. There is only one way they can earn their sovereign independence, and it is by ceasing to imperil their neighbor. ■

Doug Wilder's swan song. Best for Last

BY JASON ZENGERLE

FROM THE IMPOSING neoclassical building Thomas Jefferson designed as Virginia's state capitol to the elegant gray-stuccoed mansion Jefferson Davis used as the Confederate White House, Richmond is filled with impressive monuments to political power. Richmond City Hall, however, is not one of them.

An ugly and architecturally undistinguished 17-story office tower built in the early '70s, City Hall went from eyesore to public safety hazard about ten years ago when it started shedding its white marble skin onto the sidewalk below. Even now, as the city nears completion of a \$20 million project to replace the marble with an aluminum and stainless-steel facade, the building appears to signify not so much political power as political ineptitude. And the symbolism, unfortunately, seems apt, as Richmond—with its history of poisonous racial politics and government corruption—has been a textbook case of civic dysfunction.

But, on a recent morning at City Hall, Richmond Mayor L. Douglas Wilder sat in his second-floor corner office and pledged that the dysfunction was coming to an end. "My job, quite frankly, is to get the thing straight," he said. And, while Wilder has been on the job for only seven months, he has wasted little time in shaking up the city government he once called a "cesspool of inefficiency and corruption." Almost immediately after becoming Richmond's first popularly elected mayor in nearly 60 years—previously, the mayor had been appointed by the City Council—Wilder showed the door to the previous city manager and police chief; since then, he has forced out or accepted the resignations of a number of other high-level public employees and even eliminated whole agencies. He submitted a budget that, as one local columnist put it, took the city's "sacred cows" and "carved [them] up into hamburger." And he has pushed for—and received, from the City Council and the state legislature—even greater authority for the mayor's office. "It's hard to overstate the magnitude and the speed of the changes [Wilder has initiated]," says John Moeser, an emeritus professor of urban studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. "In just a few months, he's completely transformed Richmond's political landscape."

Fifteen years ago, as Virginia's governor, Wilder worked in much more plush environs across the street at the state capitol. But the dinginess of his City Hall office—whose views, on that recent morning, were obstructed by scaffolding and whose walls were virtually bare—has not seemed to dampen his enthusiasm for his current job and the freer hand it has afforded him. "In state government, the bureau-

cracy is more fixed, and, when a governor comes in, you're not going to change too much in terms of the format," he explained. "Local governments are more flexible, they're more pliable." One of Wilder's favorite tactics to bend bureaucrats to his will is confrontation. "I like to ask them, 'What do you produce?'" he said. "It surprises a lot of people when you ask it that way, they have to do a double-take, and it's not the majority of time that you get a satisfactory answer."

That Doug Wilder relishes a good fight is no surprise. When he was governor of Virginia, he squabbled with the legislature and powerful members of his own Democratic Party, oftentimes over the pettiest of issues. Now, as mayor of Richmond, he's embroiled in battles not only with recalcitrant bureaucrats but also with both the city's black political class and its white business establishment, and, as is Wilder's wont, the battles are frequently nasty. But the fact that Wilder is even in a position to fight with these groups—in other words, the fact that he's Richmond's mayor—is a surprise. Wilder, after all, is the man who *The Washington Post* once called "arguably the most important black American politician of the 20th century"—serving as Virginia's first black state senator since Reconstruction; Virginia's first black lieutenant governor; and, most important, the nation's first (and, to this date, only) black elected governor. And, with each accomplishment, Wilder, whose ambition was striking even for a politician, set his sights on a higher office. As a politically moderate African American Democrat from the South—a rare but potent combination—national office certainly appeared within reach. But, after ill-fated campaigns for the White House and the U.S. Senate, Wilder seemed to realize that his political career was over, and, in the mid-'90s, he left politics to teach and give speeches.

Now, however, at the age of 74, Wilder has returned to the political arena to take a low-profile job that very few local politicians—much less any politicians of national stature—even wanted. What's more, he all but concedes that, whatever ambitions he might have once had, this low-rung post will almost certainly be his last. It is, by almost any measure, an odd and unlikely final chapter in what has been a remarkable career. But, if Doug Wilder succeeds in his plans for Richmond—if he reforms its sclerotic government and heals its racial divisions—then his final political act might well serve as his most impressive and lasting achievement.

WHEN DOUG WILDER was growing up in segregated Richmond in the 1930s and 1940s, the city had a thriving black business class, so much so that one particularly bustling

black neighborhood was known as the "Black Wall Street of America." But black political power was another matter. Most black Richmonders could not vote, thanks to literacy tests and poll taxes, and the city was run by a white oligarchy. After the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the abolition of the poll tax, however, blacks in Richmond finally gained the power of the ballot—which meant that, for the first time since Reconstruction, a significant number of black Richmonders were able to achieve elected office (including Wilder, who, in 1969, won one of Richmond's two seats in the state Senate). And, since Richmond, like many other cities, featured a growing black population and a shrinking white one, it appeared inevitable that the old capital of the Confederacy would soon have, for the first time in its history, a black-controlled city government.

But, in 1970, in a desperate, last-gasp attempt to maintain white power in Richmond, the city's still-white majority City Council moved to annex part of a predominately white adjoining suburban county, thereby watering down Richmond's black vote. Richmond's black leaders sued, and, during the six years it took for the case to be decided, the city was enjoined by the U.S. Supreme Court from holding Council elections. Finally, the courts mandated the creation of a City Council comprised of nine single-member districts (instead of the existing nine at-large members), with a majority of those districts being black-majority. In 1977, the first Council elections in seven years gave Richmond its first black-majority City Council, which, in turn appointed the city's first black mayor.

Black-controlled city government, however, did not necessarily translate into good government. And, over time, Richmond became something of a civic basket case. Its crime rate soared, its bond rating plummeted, and city services dwindled. Worst of all was the seemingly endemic corruption. In 1997, a mayoral aide pled guilty to cocaine distribution and racketeering; two years later, the mayor that aide served resigned from the City Council and pled guilty to federal charges of mail fraud and obstruction of justice. And, in just the last two years, at least seven public employees, including two City Council members, have been indicted on charges ranging from corruption to drug-peddling.

The biggest obstacle to good government in Richmond was not the government's racial makeup; rather, it was the government's form. Since 1948, Richmond had operated under a council-manager system, which meant that the City Council appointed the mayor and a city manager, with the mayor serving in a mostly ceremonial capacity and the manager overseeing the daily operation of the bureaucracy. But, with the city manager reporting to nine different bosses on the City Council—and with those nine different bosses representing nine different parts of the city—the council-manager system was a recipe for dysfunction. And the dysfunction seemed impossible to correct because of Richmond's long history of racially polarized politics: Whenever anyone suggested scrapping the council-manager system for a system that had a strong mayor, the proposal was al-

most invariably denounced by some of Richmond's black political leaders as an attempt to dilute hard-earned black political power.

But, in 2002, the racial argument in favor of the council-manager system lost some of its potency when Wilder called on Richmond to adopt a strong mayor form of government by 2005. Wilder was eight years removed from the governor's mansion at the time and living in a kind of political exile—a pariah in his own party. As governor, he had angered a number of powerful Virginia Democrats, including his two immediate predecessors, Chuck Robb and Gerald Baliles; and, when he ran as an independent for the U.S. Senate in 1994—before ultimately and humiliatingly dropping out of the race before Election Day—he had angered more of them. The final break with his party came in 1997, when he refused to endorse the Democrats' gubernatorial candidate, thus costing him black votes and delivering the office to the Republicans. "He eventually realized that, because of his governorship and because of all the arguments he had with other people in his party," says University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato, "that there weren't any other elective options open to him, and he went into a nice retirement."

But Wilder still had some political capital in Richmond, and he retained a soft spot for his hometown. More important, he felt some responsibility for its plight. "I have been negligent," he said in announcing his support for a strong mayor form of government. "I have not involved myself in city politics for the entire time I have been involved in politics." So, throwing himself back into politics, he teamed up with a white former congressman, Tom Bliley, who had also served as Richmond's mayor during the years the Supreme Court enjoined the city from holding elections. He and Bliley formed a commission to study the possibility of Richmond adopting a strong mayor form of government. The commission eventually backed a proposal that stipulated that the mayor had to win a majority of the citywide vote *and* at least five of Richmond's nine Council districts, thereby making the dilution of black voting power less likely.

This plan won the enthusiastic backing of the city's white business establishment, but it still did not quell the doubts of Richmond's black political class. And, when the strong-mayor plan was put to a voter referendum in 2003, many of Richmond's black leaders, including the local chapter of the NAACP, denounced the proposal as a racist plot; some even went so far as to brand Wilder, who vigorously campaigned for the plan, an Uncle Tom. Their opposition, though, didn't seem to matter to Richmond's voters, 80 percent of whom voted to switch to a strong-mayor system beginning with the 2004 elections. Nevertheless, the prospect of becoming Richmond's suddenly strong mayor did not prove terribly enticing to the city's best and brightest political leaders. With the field of potential mayoral candidates looking less than impressive, Wilder reluctantly decided to toss his own hat in the ring. "It wasn't something I sought, something I worked for, or something I wanted to be involved in," he

said in announcing his candidacy. "It was a matter of time running out to determine who that person would be." The people of Richmond seemed to appreciate that Wilder portrayed the race as his sacrifice. Last November he was elected with nearly 80 percent of the vote.

NINE MONTHS LATER, Richmond is still adjusting to its new mayor—and Wilder isn't necessarily going out of his way to make the adjustment any easier. On the morning I visited with him at City Hall, he was looking forward to his next meeting, which was with the schools superintendent. Technically, the superintendent reports to the school board, not the mayor, but Wilder isn't one to defer to bureaucratic flow charts, and he was in a lather about Richmond's truancy problem. "We're number-one in truancy in the state!" he practically shouted. "And they've got no truancy plan at all!" He had summoned the superintendent to his office to discuss the matter. "I haven't been confrontational with her, but she has not been direct with me, and the whole purpose of the meeting today," he said, as a mischievous smile spread across his face, "is to find out how we're going to get along."

This sort of feeling-out process with Wilder has been most difficult for Richmond's City Council, which has seen its power greatly diminished under the new strong-mayor system. At first, Council members seemed to be almost too accommodating toward Wilder: Shortly after being sworn in, the mayor demanded even more power for his office—including a line-item veto and oversight of the school board's budget—and the Council readily acquiesced (thereby paving the way for the state legislature to grant the mayor's office those new powers).

But, when Wilder presented a budget in April that included more than \$10 million in cuts to so-called nondepartmental spending—on things ranging from old economic development plans to civic and arts groups—the Council balked, restoring some of the cuts in its own budget. Wilder declared the City Council's action illegal—claiming it had restored the cuts at an improperly called meeting—and said he would not enforce its budget. The Council then threatened to take the issue to court, and a nasty war of words ensued before cooler heads prevailed and a compromise was reached. Nonetheless, even though the budget fight was somewhat unseemly, many in Richmond see the give-and-take between Wilder and the Council as a good sign. "They now realize they have to justify their projects," says Paul Goldman, Wilder's chief political adviser. "Richmond is now slowly being run the way a city is supposed to be run."

The Council isn't the only group coming to grips with Wilder. Those black political leaders who opposed the strong-mayor plan on racial grounds—and who were quick to play the race card on other matters in the past—now find themselves effectively neutered. Where once they were thought to represent the views of black Richmonders, the overwhelming black support for both the strong-mayor referendum and Wilder's mayoral candidacy revealed them to

be paper tigers. And the appeal of racial pandering appears to have diminished: Where race was once the subtext of almost every political dispute in Richmond, during Wilder's recent squabbling with the Council, race hardly ever came up. "In Richmond, for many years, we've been held hostage by the sins of earlier generations and the racial politics that went on here," says Jim Ukrop, the owner of a local supermarket chain and one of Richmond's most prominent white businessmen. "But Mayor Wilder has moved us beyond racial politics."

But that doesn't mean that Wilder has kowtowed to the white business establishment, as his black critics initially argued he would. In fact, he sometimes seems to go out of his way to anger the white business community, particularly those who supported the strong-mayor plan and his candidacy. Most prominently, Wilder has opposed one of the white business community's pet development projects—building a performing arts center in downtown Richmond—on the grounds that the spending is wasteful, leaving some of his past supporters perplexed. "The white establishment is now uncertain as to what Doug's next move will be," says Raymond Boone, the editor and publisher of *The Richmond Free Press*, the city's black newspaper. "And I think that's healthy, because in the past, they had taken city funding and revenues for granted."

Indeed, Wilder has done something that many once considered impossible in Richmond politics: He has staked out a position independent of either the black political class or the white business establishment, confounding both of them. As Ukrop, who has had disagreements with Wilder since his election, concedes, "Doug Wilder sits in no one's pocket. He doesn't represent anyone's interest other than his own and what he considers the best interests of the city."

IN A WAY, Wilder is making the most out of his greatest flaw. As he rose through the ranks of Virginia politics, he acquired the reputation as a politician who was out only for himself. And that reputation was not undeserved, as, time and again, he changed positions or abandoned allies. Indeed, Wilder's failure to move on from the governor's office to the U.S. Senate was largely attributable to the many important Virginia Democrats he had alienated over the course of his career. But now, Wilder's vices—his quarrelsome nature, his stubbornness, his allegiance only to himself—have become virtues. With his self-interest aligned with Richmond's, the city has a fighting chance, because Wilder has rarely failed to act in his self-interest. Sitting in the back of a town car while being driven to a meeting on the other side of the city, Wilder boasted that he had opened a new chapter in Richmond's history. "We've got people saying, 'Look, we'll move back into the city. We feel we have a shot, we've got a chance, there's a new breath of air,'" he said, pointing to a bustling street scene as evidence of the rebirth. "For too many years," he added, "this city has been satisfied with stultified mediocrity. . . . I'm not satisfied with mediocrity." ■

How conservatism leaves us vulnerable to nuclear terrorism.

Moral Hazard

BY J. PETER SCOBLIC

EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

DEMOCRACY HAS BECOME George W. Bush's reflexive answer to terrorism. Before the wreckage left by the July 7 bombings in London had even cooled, he broke from the G-8 summit in Scotland to explain how we would defeat the perpetrators of such attacks: "We will spread an ideology of hope and compassion that will overwhelm their ideology of hate." Four days later, he elaborated, "Today in the Middle East, freedom is once again contending with an ideology that seeks to sow anger and hatred and despair. And, like fascism and communism before, the hateful ideologies that use terror will be defeated by the unstoppable power of freedom and democracy." This, of course, was not a new interpretation of the war on terrorism for the president, who, in his second inaugural this January, actually elevated democratization to the level of grand strategy, saying, "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one." A resounding sentiment—one that has provided the president with a powerful foreign policy narrative and convinced voters last November that, despite the tragedies of the Iraq war, he can best protect our national security. Yet the notion that we should defend ourselves chiefly by spreading democracy seems less than reassuring on the heels of the July 7 attack. After all, the four bombers who struck London were British—residents of one of the world's oldest and most stable democracies.

The war on terrorism is, at some level, a war of ideas: To the extent that we can substitute democracy and liberal values for autocracy and Islamic fundamentalism, we will probably improve our security—and we should therefore try to do so. But freedom—as Richard Haass, Bush's former director of policy planning at the State Department, has written—is not a doctrine. That is, the spread of freedom cannot be our guiding principle in the war on terrorism, because the spread of freedom cannot protect us from all terrorist threats, particularly the immediate ones. In fact, in the short term, democratization appears to exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, terrorism. The case in point is, of course, Iraq, which, according to the National Intelligence Council,

now serves as a training and recruitment ground for the next generation of jihadists—its popularly elected government notwithstanding. Even nations that successfully transition to democracy can breed terrorism: As former counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke has written, "In Indonesia, which just achieved its third democratic transfer of power since Suharto's rule ended in 1998, the jihadist movement is growing stronger, as it is in other Asian democracies. In Algeria, free elections in 1990 and 1991 resulted in victories for those who advocated a jihadist theocracy." Even if the president's assumptions about the pacifying effects of representative government are correct, democratization is a long-term process, taking years, decades, even centuries. Bush doesn't dispute this; in his second inaugural address, he said that spreading freedom would be the "work of generations."

Unfortunately, we don't have that kind of time—not when the next terrorist attack could be nuclear. According to a recent survey conducted by Senator Richard Lugar, proliferation experts believe on average there is about a 30 percent chance of a successful nuclear attack somewhere in the world within the next ten years. Former Secretary of Defense William Perry has put the odds of a nuclear attack on U.S. soil by 2010 at 50 percent. Graham Allison, author of *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe*, has put the odds at better than half within ten years. Unlike an attack with a conventional weapon—or even a chemical, biological, or radiological weapon—a nuclear bomb has the potential to radically alter the U.S. economic and political landscape. Although we think of the September 11 attacks as having "changed everything," they did not. Nearly 3,000 lives were lost, but the political and economic fabric of the country was not torn apart. Clearly, our foreign policy underwent a massive shift, but day-to-day life in the United States proceeds much as it did on September 10, 2001.

That would not be the case if the next terrorist attack were nuclear. A ten-kiloton bomb detonated in a U.S. city would immediately kill tens of thousands—perhaps hundreds of thousands—of people. A plume of fallout would waft from the site of the explosion, sickening and killing thousands more and contaminating 3,000 square miles of land. Hundreds of thousands of people would need to be evacuated. The infrastructure damage would be enormous: Everything within a half-mile radius of the explosion would be flattened; beyond that, buildings still standing would be mere shells, their façades stripped. The immediate economic

damage—the damage from the “hole in the ground,” as one expert put it to me—could total \$500 billion. But the greater cost would come from disruption to the national and international economies. Combined with the blow to U.S. productivity from lives lost, the cost of an attack would total trillions of dollars. No other terrorist incident could do that much damage. Indeed, of 15 scenarios discussed in a 2004 report by the Homeland Security Council—including terrorist attacks with chemical, biological, and radiological weapons—only a nuclear attack is certain to require years of recovery time. This leads to a simple conclusion: In the near term, the war on terrorism—whatever else it is—should first be a war on nuclear terrorism.

It has become all too clear, however, that this is a war the Bush administration is spectacularly ill-equipped to fight, handicapped as it is by a worldview that revolves around our enemies’ intentions rather than their capabilities. Democratization is a strategy to change the behavior of our enemies by draining them of hatred. But we cannot fully erase hatred, and Bush’s “hope and compassion” are thin defenses against a nuclear weapon. A better tack would be to strip our enemies of the ability to acquire nuclear weapons in the first place—a difficult goal, but an achievable one, given that there is a finite amount of the fissile material needed to make nuclear weapons and that, by themselves, terrorists can’t produce more. Alas, the very ideology that has led Bush to embrace democratization has also mired him in a nonproliferation strategy that emphasizes regime change while eschewing diplomacy. The administration is consumed by the idea that the character of states is of primary importance to U.S. security. This ideology, this conservative fixation, explains why, for much of Bush’s presidency, his administration focused on Iraq to the exclusion of North Korea and Iran. It explains why Bush stood by while Pyongyang moved to produce enough plutonium for half a dozen nuclear weapons. It even explains why he has acted so slowly in securing the hundreds of tons of vulnerable nuclear material in Russia. Indeed, an examination of the Bush administration’s ideology shows that, not only has it made some bad decisions for U.S. security, but that it is constitutionally incapable of making the right ones.

INTENTIONAL FOUL

TO MOST AMERICANS, it is self-evident that George W. Bush understands the significance of the nuclear threat. It was Bush, after all, who, just months after the September 11 attacks, declared Iran, Iraq, and North Korea an “axis of evil,” because they were “seeking weapons of mass destruction” and “could provide these arms to terrorists.” It was Bush who argued, in his June 2002 West Point graduation speech, that “the war on terror will not be won on the defensive,” because “containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.” It was

Bush who elevated preemption to the level of doctrine in his National Security Strategy, because, “in an age where the enemies of civilization openly and actively seek the world’s most destructive technologies, the United States cannot remain idle while dangers gather.” And, of course, it was Bush who said in October 2002 that we needed to confront Iraq lest Saddam Hussein “be in a position to threaten America ... [or] to pass nuclear technology to terrorists.” But, if Bush truly understands the significance of the nuclear threat, then why did he focus on Iraq and ignore Iran and North Korea, which, as of late 2002 and early 2003, clearly posed greater nuclear dangers?

In August 2002, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a group opposed to Tehran’s ruling mullahs, announced that Iran was covertly building uranium-enrichment facilities near the towns of Arak and Natanz. Then, in December, a Washington-based nonprofit announced that analysis of photos and satellite images of the sites confirmed the group’s claims. In February 2003, Iranian President Mohammed Khatami acknowledged that Iran was building facilities that would enable it to control the entire nuclear fuel cycle—from uranium-mining to enrichment to reprocessing—meaning it would be able to produce fissile material for weapons. And, several weeks later, officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) sent to inspect Natanz were reportedly shocked to discover more than 100 functioning centrifuges and parts for hundreds more. Also in February 2003, the Defense Intelligence Agency estimated that Tehran could have an atomic bomb by the end of the decade—about the same time the intelligence community thought Saddam could. What’s more, the State Department’s “Patterns of Global Terrorism” report, released in March 2003, concluded that “Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2002.”

North Korea presented an even clearer threat. When Bush took office, North Korea was already thought to have one or two bombs’ worth of plutonium, and, in October 2002, just two days before Bush gave a major speech calling the threat from Iraq “unique,” North Korea reportedly told an American official it had a secret—and illicit—program to enrich uranium. Amid the diplomatic fallout from that admission, Pyongyang restarted a nuclear plant and a reprocessing facility that had been shut down by a 1994 agreement with the United States. By the time the United States invaded Iraq, North Korea was in a position to produce four to six bombs’ worth of plutonium within six months. Though it had few terrorist ties, it had a known history of exporting weapons technology to countries like Pakistan.

In other words, while Iraq was merely suspected of having a nuclear program that would take years to produce a nuclear weapon, North Korea, a known weapons proliferator, had a nuclear program that could produce plutonium for weapons within months; and Iran, whose terrorist ties were more extensive than Iraq’s, was clearly on the cusp of producing fissile material. Yet, while the president and his advisers were warning of impending Iraqi mushroom

clouds over U.S. cities, they dismissed the notion that the situation in North Korea was a crisis, and they ignored Iran. They went to war even after, on March 7, 2003, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei reported, "After three months of intrusive inspections, we have, to date, found no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq." While hawks in the United States clamored about the danger from Iraq's weapons, the inspectors on the ground in Iraq were telling us there were none. This judgment was confirmed after the war by the U.S. Iraq Survey Group, which concluded, "Iraq did not possess a nuclear device, nor had it tried to reconstitute a capability to produce nuclear weapons after 1991." From a nuclear security perspective, then, the decision to invade Iraq looks horribly misguided.

The reason for Bush's poor judgment is that, despite his public pronouncements, nuclear weapons were not his priority; regime change in Iraq was. This goal was not, as some critics have claimed, merely a function of the long-standing Iraq obsession some of his officials evinced; it was a function of the ideology that drove the Bush White House. Conservatives start with the premise that states (as opposed to, say, international institutions or even terrorist groups) drive international behavior. So, after the September 11 attacks, they argued that the best way to fight terrorism was to fight the regimes that support it. As then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said on September 13, 2001, fighting terrorism "is not just simply a matter of capturing people and holding them accountable, but removing the sanctuaries, removing the support systems, ending states who sponsor terrorism." Insofar as nuclear terrorism goes, there is a lot to be said for focusing on states: Producing fissile material for a nuclear weapon requires such extensive infrastructure that only states can do it; so, if you can stop them from giving nuclear material to terrorists, you can stop nuclear terrorism. Alas, the White House's state-centrism did not yield a focus on rogue states' capabilities, but rather on their intentions. Bush officials wanted not simply to defang enemy regimes, but to change them—to end them, as Wolfowitz said. This preference for regime change as post-September 11 strategy is the natural outgrowth of the conservative belief that the moral character of a state should determine how the United States engages it, or whether it does so at all. As Dick Cheney once put it, "We don't negotiate with evil; we defeat it." Negotiating with monstrous regimes like Saddam's is considered appeasement, making force the preferred method of dealing with them—an instinct that dovetails nicely with conservatism's post-Vietnam concern with rebuilding the U.S. military and reasserting U.S. primacy.

For conservatives, then, Iraq—an odious regime that was susceptible to change because of its military weakness—was the most logical target for action. Iran and North Ko-



rea, by contrast, while hardly paragons of liberalism, did not spark the same moral outrage in conservatives that, say, Saddam's use of chemical weapons against the Kurds did. Moreover, a case could be made that regime change in Iraq could spark regime change elsewhere in the Middle East—a case that could not be made for North Korea. And, finally, Iran and North Korea posed far more substantial military challenges. Iran, in the words of Kenneth Pollack, author of *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, has "three times the population, four times the landmass, and five times the problems" as Iraq. North Korea has a million-man army, and U.S. war games suggest that combat with the North could leave hundreds of thousands of Americans and South Koreans dead. Ridding the world of a monster via regime change thus became its own goal, irrespective of the threat to U.S. security. The danger—or lack thereof—from Saddam's supposed weapons of mass destruction was almost beside the point. As Wolfowitz admitted to *Vanity Fair* in May 2003, the WMD argument that Bush made was one of convenience: "The truth is that, for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy, we settled

on the one issue that everyone could agree on, which was weapons of mass destruction."

UNFORTUNATELY, REGIME CHANGE was not only the administration's preferred end in Iraq, but its preferred means everywhere else, as well. If negotiating with evil regimes equals appeasement, then diplomacy to resolve rogue-state nuclear threats is out of the question. But, aside from military action, conservatism suggests few courses of action, and, with the bulk of our combat forces tied up in Iraq, forcible regime change was not an option in North Korea or Iran. So, not only did conservatism lead us to war against a nation that was not threatening us, it paralyzed us from dealing with those nations that were.

From his first days in office, Bush refused to engage North Korea. In March 2001, he announced that he would not continue talks begun by the Clinton administration with Pyongyang to end its missile program, saying he had "skepticism" about North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. A senior American official told journalist James Mann that the administration didn't want to deal with North Korea because it wasn't a democracy. As Mann explains in his book *Rise of the Vulcans*, for the Bush administration, "[n]o deal was better than one that didn't work or one that helped keep a brutal regime in power." That attitude was only reinforced once North Korea admitted its uranium-enrichment program. For three months, the Bush team simply refused to talk to Pyongyang. Indeed, as was recently reported by journalist Don Oberdorfer and former U.S. Ambassador Donald Gregg, it spurned a direct offer from Kim to Bush that read, "If the United States recognizes our sovereignty and assures non-aggression, it is our view that we should be able to find a way to resolve the nuclear issue in compliance with the demands of a new century." When the United States did eventually sit down with North Korea, it would do so only if China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea also participated in six-party talks, so that it could not be seen as giving in to North Korea's request for bilateral negotiations. And, for more than a year, it refused to address any of North Korea's concerns, instead simply repeating over and over that Pyongyang needed to completely, verifiably, and irreversibly dismantle its nuclear program before the United States would engage. In fact, the administration routinely went out of its way to insult North Korea, for no discernable reason other than to prevent diplomatic progress. (It is not a stretch to think that one of the reasons the six-party talks resumed this week after a yearlong lull is that Bush started referring to North Korea's leader as "Mr. Kim," instead of "pygmy" or "tyrant.")

Which is not to say the Bush administration has no strategy—it's just not a very good one. Both Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Cheney have suggested that economic pressure could force Kim's downfall—i.e., non-military regime change. As a Bush official told *The New York Times*' Bill Keller in 2003, "If we could have contain-

ment that's tailored to the conditions of North Korea and not continue to throw it lifelines like we have in the past, I think it goes away." But regime change via containment is a long shot. The North Koreans have endured 50-plus years of U.S. sanctions, and even the fact that millions of North Koreans are starving or severely malnourished has done little to destabilize the government or weaken its negotiating position. As Nicholas Kristof of the *Times* recently reported from Pyongyang, "The central paradox of North Korea is this: No government in the world today is more brutal or has failed its people more abjectly, yet it appears to be in solid control and may even have substantial popular support." The Bush administration has been hoping the Chinese, on whom the North Koreans depend for food and energy, would be willing to cut off aid, but Beijing fears instability on the Korean Peninsula more than it fears a nuclearized North.

The administration's response to critics who question containment's efficacy is the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a loose federation of countries who cooperate to interdict illegal weapons transfers at sea. The problem, of course, is that PSI does nothing to prevent the North from producing fissile material in the first place (as it apparently continues to do), building nuclear weapons, and mounting them on ballistic missiles. Moreover, given that a weapon's worth of plutonium can weigh as little as nine pounds, and, given that neither China nor South Korea has agreed to participate in the program, PSI offers little reassurance that terrorists could not procure a North Korean nuke.

Bush's approach to Iran and its nuclear threat seems depressingly similar. His administration has refused to negotiate with Tehran, though it belatedly (and skeptically) endorsed talks being conducted by the British, French, and Germans aimed at mothballing the more dangerous elements of its nuclear program. The preferred U.S. approach has been to seek Security Council sanctions to better isolate Iran in the hopes of changing its behavior or forcing its government out of power. As with North Korea, however, it remains unclear how this would prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons or providing nuclear material to terrorist groups in the interim. (Indeed, even in the long run, regime change seems an unlikely solution, given that Iran's liberal activists seem as wedded to the country's nuclear program as its hard-liners.) The apparent reason for not engaging Iran is the same as that for not engaging North Korea: It is an enemy regime that oppresses its people. When, in January, Senator Joseph Biden asked Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at her confirmation hearing whether she would support a verifiable deal that got rid of Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, she demurred: "Oh, I think we would have to say that the relationship with Iran has more components than the nuclear side." What components could possibly be more important than nuclear weapons issues? According to Rice, human rights—that is, the moral character of Iran's government.

Indeed, even the administration's one rogue-state prolif-

eration success shows how its fixation on regime change impedes our foreign policy. On December 19, 2003, the Libyan government announced that it would give up its unconventional weapons programs and submit to international inspections. In return, the United States and Britain lifted sanctions that had been in place since Libyan operatives assisted in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. The success was the product of years of talks, whose turning point was the German and Italian seizure of a ship, the *BBC China*, carrying nuclear centrifuges to Libya from the network run by Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan. (Although Bush officials long credited PSI for the seizure, State Department and foreign officials now admit the operation had nothing to do with the initiative.) The deal almost fell through, however, because John Bolton, then Bush's top arms control official, reportedly insisted in talks that Washington's ultimate goal was regime change in Libya. Fortunately, according to *Newsweek*, high-level British officials intervened, asking the State Department to pull Bolton from the U.S. delegation and reassuring Muammar Qaddafi that policy change, not regime change, was the goal. Left unchecked, the administration's ideological impulses would have scuttled the negotiations. Libya is, in other words, the exception that proves the rule: Conservatism is constitutionally incapable of effectively fighting nuclear terrorism.

CAPABILITY GAP

WOULD-BE TERRORISTS can get their hands on fissile material or a nuclear weapon from two sources: a rogue-state government or a state where nuclear materials are poorly secured and thus susceptible to theft. Experience suggests that pairing diplomacy with the threat of military force can successfully deal with the first—provided we focus on the material and weapons, not the regime itself. In 1994, for example, the Clinton administration successfully locked down North Korea's plutonium production. The previous year, the IAEA had become suspicious that two North Korean nuclear energy facilities were being used to produce fuel for an atomic bomb in violation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). But, when the IAEA requested special inspections of the facilities to assuage its concerns, Pyongyang refused, sparking an international crisis. Responding to that crisis, the United States negotiated directly with Pyongyang while simultaneously building up U.S. forces in South Korea. President Clinton appeared willing to strike the North, but he was also willing to buy it off if that would work. It was this iron-fist-velvet-glove approach that eventually led North Korea to sign the Agreed Framework, which froze its plutonium-producing nuclear program. The Clinton team's engagement was a superb example of coercive diplomacy.



Some ideas are more durable than others.

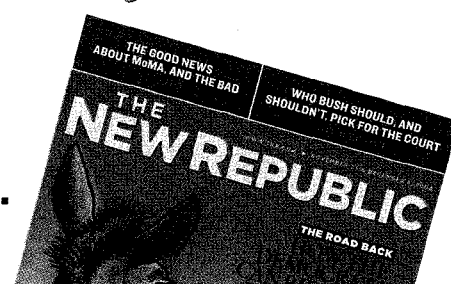
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Where opinions get started.



Even the fact that North Korea eventually cheated on the agreement by starting a parallel program to enrich uranium does not change the fact that it made the world safer for eight years. The Bush administration's disgust with Pyongyang's behavior is understandable, and its reluctance to engage may be morally satisfying, but, pragmatically, the standard for arms control agreements ought simply to be that we gain more from them than we lose. The Agreed Framework met that standard.

A similar focus on the weapons rather than the regime—on capabilities rather than intentions—might well have prevented the Iraq war. After all, coercive diplomacy worked there, too. The Bush administration simply failed to accept success. By early 2002, international weapons inspectors had not been in Iraq in over three years, and the widespread concern was that Saddam was trying to reconstitute his WMD programs. The Bush administration therefore began to pressure Iraq. In September 2002, the president addressed the United Nations, calling for a return of inspectors and compliance with U.N. resolutions. Four days later, Iraq announced that it would allow the return of U.N. and IAEA inspectors. In October, Congress authorized the use of force, and, in November, Iraq actually let the inspectors in. After inspectors claimed, in January 2003, that Iraq was not cooperating and had not provided a full account of its weapons programs, the United States increased the pressure on Saddam by, among other things, having then-Secretary of State Colin Powell brief the United Nations the following month. Within weeks, inspectors were reporting increased compliance. With each increase in pressure, Saddam responded by allowing greater access, and, in March, IAEA inspectors confirmed that they had unearthed no evidence of a nuclear program. At this point, a pragmatist would have concluded that invasion was not warranted—or, at least, that a reappraisal of the situation was—but, since Bush's true objective was regime change, the plans for war proceeded, and, on March 19, the invasion of Iraq commenced.

A terrorist could also acquire a weapon or the fissile material for one from states, such as Russia and Pakistan, with lax nuclear security. Alas, even in Russia, the Bush administration's focus on intentions has eclipsed the danger from capabilities. In the early '90s, Congress established and funded the Nunn-Lugar programs to dismantle nuclear weapons and secure fissile material in the former Soviet Union. After the September 11 attacks, one would have expected the administration to dramatically expand this program, since Russia, despite years of work under Nunn-Lugar, remained a potential Home Depot for nuclear terrorists, as a bipartisan commission chaired by Howard Baker and Lloyd Cutler put it in 2001. It did not. In fact, in the two years after September 11, Russia's nuclear material was secured no more quickly than it had been in the previous two years. Why such tepid support for a program *The 9/11 Commission Report* said was "in need of expansion, improvement, and resources"? Because many in the administration continue to view Russia as a strategic threat. Michael Nacht, an adviser to the Defense

Threat Reduction Agency during Bush's first term, says that many Pentagon, White House, and intelligence officials believe Nunn-Lugar is "a subsidy to the Russians. ... All we're doing is freeing up funds that they would spend on [securing nuclear material], which they would then turn and spend on weapons programs." Weapons programs, that is, that could potentially threaten us. Once again, the conservative impulse to prioritize a state's intentions has prevented us from addressing its dangerous capabilities. Ironically, this impulse can have the same effect vis-à-vis countries the administration sees positively, such as Pakistan, whose nuclear behavior we tacitly sanction despite the danger that its nuclear weapons or fissile material could fall into terrorist hands.

PREVENTING TERRORISTS FROM acquiring nuclear material, however, will require more than securing existing fissile stockpiles—it will require revamping the NPT, which allows only five signatories (the United States, Russia, China, France, and Britain) to possess nuclear weapons but allows the rest to enrich uranium and reprocess plutonium for peaceful purposes, such as generating energy. This provision is the back door that Iran and North Korea have exploited to advance their nuclear programs, and a politically diverse constituency—from Bush to Kofi Annan—agrees that the NPT needs to be strengthened or supplemented to prevent further abuse. Doing so, however, will take considerable political capital, because the 183 members of the treaty that are barred from having nuclear weapons must be convinced that they should consent to further restrictions on their nuclear activities. Unfortunately, not only does the United States not have the political capital to effectively make that case, it's not even clear the Bush team would spend it if it did.

The Bush administration, after all, does not believe in internationally binding commitments, particularly arms control treaties—another outgrowth of conservatism, which insists that any constraint on U.S. sovereignty necessarily harms U.S. interests. In 2001 alone, the Bush White House rejected a provision to enforce the Biological Weapons Convention, which bans the possession of germs for offensive military use, even though it would have given us the ability to inspect suspicious facilities in other countries (and even though the prospect of germ warfare was made unpleasantly clear by the 2001 anthrax attacks). It repeatedly expressed its opposition to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, boycotted a meeting on its entry-into-force, and refused to consider ratifying it, while simultaneously urging other nations to maintain the worldwide moratorium on nuclear testing. It undercut a U.N. effort to restrict trade in small arms, which fuel Third World conflicts, even though the proposed measures were less restrictive than the domestic laws that regulate firearms in the United States. And it announced U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in order to pursue a missile defense system that some experts said was not even ready for the testing prohibited by it.

So, when Bush decided that the United States needed to stop countries from legally developing nuclear technology that they could turn around and use in a weapons program, it was hardly surprising that he proposed voluntary restrictions instead of legally binding measures. Rather than trying to revamp the NPT or negotiate a new set of rules governing nuclear technology, he merely suggested that members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)—a loose consortium of 45 states who are supposed to coordinate their exports of atomic technology—more tightly restrict their sales. It wasn't a bad suggestion, just an inadequate one. After all, the NSG does not incorporate all nuclear suppliers—including countries like Pakistan that are known nuclear exporters—and compliance with its rules is optional, meaning that members can violate them with impunity, as Russia has done. Indeed, the Bush administration itself threatened to seriously undercut the NSG's authority last week when it agreed to export nuclear technology to India, one of the few states that doesn't belong to the NPT.

Even if Bush wanted to negotiate a binding agreement, however, it's not clear that anyone would go along. The only way that non-nuclear weapon states would agree to further restrictions on their nuclear activities is if the nuclear weapon states moved closer to disarmament, as the NPT requires. But that's not something the Bush administration is willing to do. In fact, it has spent the past four years actively undermining many steps toward the disarmament that the United States and the other nuclear powers agreed to in 2000. It has undercut the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, as well as negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. And it has sought funding to research new and modified low-yield and bunker-busting nuclear weapons. Even the 2002 Moscow Treaty, under which the United States and Russia pledged to slash their deployed nuclear arsenals by several thousand weapons, allows the parties simply to take warheads off their missiles and store both, presumably for use in the future. That's why, at the most recent NPT review conference this May, a group of seven states known as the New Agenda Coalition (including several countries with close ties to the United States, such as New Zealand and Mexico) spoke of "increasingly widespread concern and impatience with the unsatisfactory progress being made toward nuclear disarmament" by the United States, Russia, China, France, and Great Britain.

Not only does the Bush administration dismiss such criticism, it has refused to compromise on any of its positions—even if doing so would advance U.S. goals. As Assistant Secretary of State Stephen Rademaker explained to *Arms Control Today* in May, "We are not approaching this [NPT] review conference from the cynical perspective of, We are going to toss a few crumbs to the rest of the world, and, by doing that, try to buy goodwill or bribe countries into agreeing to the agenda that we think they should focus on rather than some other agenda." Of course, buying goodwill and bribing countries is not cynical—it's what diplomacy is all

about. In other words, the Bush administration's ideology is such that, not only won't it negotiate with our enemies, it won't negotiate with our friends—even if it would improve our national security. So, if the United States wants to better protect itself, it needs to replace the ideology that's running our foreign policy.

FIGHTING NUCLEAR TERRORISM is a strategic necessity. But, if the Bush administration is constitutionally incapable of doing so because of its conservatism, then this strategic necessity effects a political necessity: the removal of Republicans from the White House. Conservative intransigence means that, if the Democrats don't take up the fight, no one will, and the country will remain frighteningly vulnerable. The irony, of course, is that Bush's reelection can be attributed to the American people's trust in him to keep them safe—a trust based largely on his belief that the character of states matters. After all, his emphasis on democratization covered up the evaporation of the administration's original *casus belli* in Iraq, and it provided an optimistic vision of the future in which the war on terrorism will be won by virtue of our virtue. Most important, his description of the war on terrorism as a battle between freedom and tyranny—a battle, in effect, between good and evil—appealed to the public's need for narrative in politics.

For Democrats to place nuclear terrorism atop the U.S. agenda, then, they will need to learn something about telling stories to the American people. Only then will the public comprehend the danger that the Bush administration has left us in and do something about it. After all, John Kerry was perceived as weak on national security, even though he proposed a raft of ideas—from one-on-one negotiations with North Korea to increased funding for Nunn-Lugar—that highlighted and addressed Bush's deficiencies. (He even went so far as to articulate a mantra: "No material. No bomb. No nuclear terrorism.") What Kerry lacked was not so much the guts of a good policy but the connective tissue that would have made it into a cohesive whole. He had foreign policies but no foreign policy.

Democrats need to transcend technocracy and articulate a worldview centered on our security. They need to describe America's immediate antagonist not as ideological, as the president has, but as technological. They must explain that nuclear weapons—not simply abstractions like tyranny or hate or evil—pose the greatest threat to the United States. And they must explain that, in contrast to Bush's fantasy, in which the earth is cleansed of evil, theirs is a story—all the more optimistic because of its realism—in which the concrete goal of securing and destroying fissile material can be accomplished through concrete steps. The themes are simple. The war on terrorism may be a war of ideas, but it is first a war of means. It is a war of intentions, but it is first a war of capabilities. It is a war against all terrorists, but it is first a war against nuclear terrorists. After all, the best stories are the ones in which the hero survives. ■

BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS Encore

IN 1973 INGMAR BERGMAN WROTE and directed a six-part television serial called *Scenes From a Marriage* that dealt with the marital experiences of a Stockholm couple named Johan and Marianne. Bergman then condensed the series into a feature film, and in 1981 he made and staged a theater version. In 1983, when he finished *After the Rehearsal*, he said that he would not direct again. He subsequently wrote some screenplays, but others directed them. However, in 2002 Bergman turned again to Johan and Marianne, now thirty years older, and for this postlude to *Scenes*, which he calls **SARABAND**, also done for television, he directed as well as wrote. Again he has said he will do no more directing, and as he is now eighty-seven, we can no longer hope for a change of mind.

To watch *Saraband* begin is to feel a surge of happiness. Any qualm that an admirer might have about a tremor in the master's directorial hand is swept away. The Bergman calm surety, the Bergman envelopment of drama in a carapace of quiet, the Bergman gift of immediacy—all these are soon evident. The very making of *Saraband* is one more Bergman marvel.

His hallmarks are notable throughout. At the start, as she did in *Hour of the Wolf*, Liv Ullmann comes in, sits, and addresses us. (Occasionally she speaks to us during the film, thus enlisting us as confidantes.) In an early scene, we hear the ticking of a clock, Bergman's familiar hint about mortality. Later, too, there is a scene in a country church that, with its blend of chill and refuge, reminds us of *Winter Light*. From time to time, as in the past, the camera gently closes in on a speaker as if to suggest that it is convinced about what he or she has been saying.

The editor was Sylvia Ingemarsson,

who, among other credits, edited *Fanny and Alexander* in 1982 and is obviously attuned to Bergman's ideas of simplicity and point. The cinematography, too, is at the Bergman level. He used three people from Swedish television who were up to his standard—the painterly without the arty. Per-Olof Lantto, Sofi Stridh, and Raymond Wemmenlöv provide many, many moments that render faces and places as themselves yet also as their quintessence.

The cast? It is hard to use that workaday term about the two leading actors. Would

Bergman have undertaken this film if Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson, the original Marianne and Johan, were not available? Their very presence, for those who love them, is moving. Despite what we know of other films that these two have done in the last three decades, the effect is almost as if Marianne and Johan, interrupting their lives elsewhere, had consented to return to the screen.

There are only three other actors—one of whom appears in the very last scene and is silent—so once again a Bergman film, in his long homage to his venerated Strindberg, has the feel of a chamber play. Johan has a sixtyish son, Henrik, a musician and professor of music, whose mother was Johan's wife before Marianne. Henrik is the most intricate character in the piece, and Börje Ahlstedt encompasses him. I once saw Ahlstedt as Claudius in Bergman's *Hamlet* and was prepared for his control of complications. Henrik, whose wife has died, has a nineteen-year-old daughter, Karin, whom he is instructing in the cello. She is played by Julia Dufvenius, who, whatever her own age, is here brimming with mercurial nineteen.

Now we arrive at a sadness. The screenplay dissatisfies. Admittedly, it begins with a burden: its antecedent, *Scenes*

From a Marriage, is one of the last century's major dramatic works about conjugal life. (The DVD of the full-length original confirms this view wonderfully, as does its screenplay, published in Alan Blair's supple translation.) We can't help expecting an equivalent sequel. But *Saraband* is not only quite different, it is lesser.

Marianne, a lawyer who is still practicing, decides to visit her ex-husband, Johan, a retired professor who lives in a country house. They were divorced more than thirty years earlier. The sheer idea of Marianne's visit is exciting, but from the first moment of their reunion, the pitch wavers. When Marianne wakes Johan, who is dozing over a book on his veranda, the scene seems like a rough draft of what it ought to have been. Thirty years have passed, yet neither of them comments with much perception or affection on how the other one looks.

After some nestling in quirks and habits, mostly Johan's, the film settles down to its real subject. *Saraband* is almost completely devoted to Henrik's relationship with his daughter and, in some measure, Johan's relationship with both. Henrik, a cellist (and organist and musicologist), is fearful that Karin will leave him. He is a volatile man who, several times, races through a dizzying spectrum of emotions. He loves and bullies Karin. There is even a hint of incest—he and she sleep in the same bed, and one of their kisses is not exactly familial—but nothing is made of it.

Karin is suffering from both his moods and his dependence on her. (So far as we can see, religion is of no special moment to her, yet throughout the film she wears a cross on a chain around her neck. Here again, as with the hinted incest, nothing is made of it.) Family complications deepen because Johan loves her and despises Henrik, and Henrik seethes with hatred of his domineering father. The picture's climax arises out of a possible move in Karin's musical career that would mean departure from her father.

This last fact fixes the film's basic oddity. The climax has nothing to do with Marianne. Very little in the whole story involves her, though she is sometimes an empathic listener. At the beginning,

SARABAND
(Sony Pictures
Classics)

when Marianne decides to revisit Johan, we hope—understandably—for the continuance of their story after a lapse of thirty years. But the picture is not about them: Marianne's visit only provides a means for telling the Johan-Henrik-Karin story. A last scene is tacked on to let Marianne show what she has learned from her visit to Johan, but it has a feeling of belated repair. Further, a photograph of Henrik's wife, Karin's mother, figures prominently in the film and at the end is seen in Marianne's personal photo

collection. Why in the world would Marianne have a copy of that photo among her pictures, except to buttress an author's hope for symmetry?

In his preface to the screenplay of *Scenes From a Marriage*, Bergman wrote: "This opus took three months to write, but rather a long part of my life to experience." However long it took him to write *Saraband*, it doesn't reflect much experience of the thirty-year schism in the Marianne-Johan relationship. This is not to argue that an author must literally have

experienced what he writes about, but the screenplay of *Saraband* feels concocted, not absorbed from life in sense and soul like so much of Bergman's work. It is as if someone had merely summoned elements—tormented people, mainly—that would make a script in Bergman style. It produces little of the customary awe we feel because he has plumbed what are, or could be, our secrets.

Still—a word that here is richly freighted—the making of the film in itself gives us a last glimpse of a genius. ■

Amartya Sen

Argument and History

What India's modern democracy owes to its ancient culture of disputation.

I.

PROLIXITY IS NOT ALIEN TO US in India. We are able to talk at some length. Krishna Menon's record for the longest speech ever delivered at the United Nations (eight hours nonstop), established half a century ago, has not been equaled by anyone from anywhere. Other peaks of loquaciousness have been scaled by other Indians. We do like to speak.

This is not a new habit. The ancient Sanskrit epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which are frequently compared to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are colossally longer than the works that Homer could manage. The *Mahabharata* alone is about seven times as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together. I recall with much joy how my own life was vastly enriched when I first encountered the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as a restless youngster looking for intellectual stimulation as well as sheer entertainment. They proceed from stories to stories woven around their principal tales, but they are also full of dialogues, dilemmas, and alternative perspectives. We find masses of arguments and counter-arguments spread over incessant debates and disputations.

The arguments are also, often enough, quite substantive. The famous *Bhagavad-Gita*, which is a small section of the *Mahabharata*, presents a tussle between two contrary moral positions:

Krishna's emphasis on doing one's duty and Arjuna's focus on avoiding bad consequences (and generating good ones). The debate occurs on the eve of the great war that is a central event in the *Mahabharata*. Watching the two armies readying for war, Arjuna, the peerless and invincible warrior in the army of the just and honorable royal family (the Pandavas) who are about to fight the unjust usurpers (the Kauravas), raises profound doubts about the correctness of what they are doing. Arjuna questions whether it is right to be concerned only with one's duty to promote a just cause, and to be indifferent to the misery and the slaughter that the war itself would undoubtedly bring. Krishna, a divine incarnation in the form of a human being, argues against Arjuna. His response takes the form of articulating principles of action based on the priority of doing one's duty, which have been repeated again and again in Indian philosophy. Krishna insists on Arjuna's duty to fight, irrespective of his evaluation of the consequences. It is a just cause, and, as a warrior and a general on whom his side must rely, Arjuna cannot waver from his obligations, no matter what the consequences are.

Krishna's hallowing of duty wins the argument, at least as seen in the religious perspective. Indeed, Krishna's conversations with Arjuna, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, became a treatise of great theological importance in Hindu philosophy, focus-

ing particularly on the removal of Arjuna's doubts. Krishna's moral position has also been eloquently endorsed by many philosophers and writers in the West. It was spectacularly praised by Humboldt in the early nineteenth century as "the most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue." In the *Four Quartets*, Eliot summarizes Krishna's view in the form of an admonishment: "And do not think of the fruit of action./Fare forward." Eliot explains: "Not fare well,/But fare forward, voyagers."

The *Mahabharata* presents each of the arguments with much care and sympathy. Indeed, the tragic desolation that the post-combat and post-carnage land—largely the Indo-Gangetic plain—seems to face toward the end of the epic may even be seen as something of a vindication of Arjuna's profound doubts. Arjuna's arguments are not really vanquished, no matter what the "message" of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is meant to be. There remains a powerful case for "faring well" and not just "faring forward."

J. Robert Oppenheimer was moved to quote Krishna's words—"I am become death, the destroyer of worlds"—on July

Amartya Sen received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998. His new book, THE ARGUMENTATIVE INDIAN: WRITINGS ON INDIAN HISTORY, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY, will be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in October.

16, 1945, as he watched the awesome force of the first nuclear explosion devised by man. Like the advice that Arjuna had received about his duty as a warrior fighting for a just cause, the American physicist could find justification in his technical commitment to develop a bomb for what was clearly the right side in a terrible war. Scrutinizing his own actions, Oppenheimer said later on: "When you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success." Despite that compulsion to fare forward, then, there was reason also for reflecting on Arjuna's concerns. How can good come from killing so many people? And why should I seek victory, sovereignty, or happiness only for my own side?

These arguments remain thoroughly relevant in the contemporary world. The case for doing what one sees as one's duty must always be strong—but how can we be indifferent to the consequences that may follow from our doing what we take to be our just duty? As we reflect on the problems of our world (from terrorism, wars, and violence to epidemics, insecurity, and grueling poverty), or on India's special concerns (such as economic development, nuclear confrontation, and regional peace), it is important to take on board Arjuna's consequentialist analysis, in addition to considering Krishna's arguments for doing one's duty. In examining the reach and the significance of many of the debates and altercations that have figured prominently in the Indian argumentative tradition, we have to take note not only of the opinions that won (or allegedly won) in the disputations, but also of the other points of view that were presented and are recorded or remembered. A defeated argument that refuses to be obliterated can remain very much alive.

II.

BUT THERE IS A SERIOUS QUESTION to be asked as to whether the tradition of arguments and disputations has been confined to an exclusive part of the Indian population, perhaps just to the members of the male elite. India has had deep inequalities along the lines of gender, class, caste, and community. The social relevance of the great tradition of argument would be severely limited if disadvantaged sections were effectively barred

from participation in it. But the story here is more complex than a simple generalization can capture.

I begin with gender. There can be little doubt that men have tended to rule the roost in Indian public argument. Yet the participation of women in political leadership and intellectual pursuits has not been at all negligible. This is obvious enough today, particularly in politics. Indeed, many of the dominant political parties in India, national as well as regional, are currently led by women, and have been so led in the past. There were many more women in positions of importance in the national movement for Indian independence, led by the Congress Party, than in the Russian and Chinese revolutionary movements put together. It is also worth noting that Sarojini Naidu, the first woman president of the Indian National Congress, was elected in 1925, fifty years before the election of Margaret Thatcher, the first woman leader of a major British political party. The second woman head of the Indian National Congress, Nellie Sengupta, was elected in 1933.

These developments are products of relatively recent times. But what about the distant past? Women's traditional role in debates and discussions has certainly been much less pronounced than that of men in India. (This would also be true of most countries and traditions in the world.) But it would be a mistake to think that vocal leadership by women is completely out of line with anything that has happened in India's past. Even if we go back all the way to ancient India, some of the most celebrated dialogues have involved women, with the sharpest questionings often coming from female interlocutors. And the arguments presented by women speakers in epics and classical tales, or in recorded history, do not always conform to the tender and peace-loving image that is often assigned to women.

The representation of women in public reasoning can be traced as far back as the *Upanishads*, the dialectical treatises that were composed from about the eighth century B.C.E. and are often taken to be foundations of Hindu philosophy. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, for example, we are told about the famous "arguing combat" in which Yajnavalkya, the outstanding scholar and teacher, has to face questions from the assembled gathering of pundits, and it is a woman scholar, Gargi, who provides the sharpest

edge to the intellectual interrogation. She enters the fray without any special modesty: "Venerable Brahmins, with your permission I shall ask him two questions only. If he is able to answer those questions of mine, then none of you can ever defeat him in expounding the nature of God." And Yajnavalkya's wife Maitreyi raises a profoundly important motivational question when the two discuss the reach of wealth in the context of the problems and predicaments of human life, in particular what wealth can or cannot do for us. Maitreyi wonders whether it could be the case that if "the whole earth, full of wealth" were to belong just to her, she could achieve immortality through it. "No," responds Yajnavalkya, "like the life of rich people will be your life. But there is no hope of immortality by wealth." And Maitreyi remarks: "What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal?"

Maitreyi's question has been repeatedly cited in Indian religious philosophy to illustrate both the nature of the human predicament and the limitations of the material world. But there is another aspect of this exchange that has more immediate interest. This concerns the relation—and the distance—between income and achievement, between the commodities that we can buy and the actual capabilities that we can enjoy, between our economic wealth and our ability to live as we would like. While there is a connection between opulence and our ability to achieve what we value, the linkage may or may not be very close. Maitreyi's worldly worries might well have some transcendental relevance (as Indian religious commentators have discussed over the centuries), but they certainly have worldly interest as well. If we are concerned with the freedom to live long and live well, our focus has to be directly on life and death, and not just on wealth and economic opulence.

IF IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO SEE THE Indian argumentative tradition as the exclusive preserve of men, it is also necessary to understand that the use of argumentative encounters has frequently crossed the barriers of class and caste. The challenge to religious orthodoxy has often come from spokesmen of socially disadvantaged groups. Disadvantage is, of course, a comparative concept. When Brahminical orthodoxy was disputed in ancient India by members of

other groups (including merchants and craftsmen), the fact that the protesters were often quite affluent should not distract attention from the fact that, in the context of Brahmin-dominated orthodoxy, they were distinctly underprivileged. This may be particularly significant in understanding the class basis of the rapid spread of Buddhism in India. The undermining of the superiority of the priestly caste played quite a big part in these initially rebellious religious movements, which included Jainism as well as Buddhism. It included a "leveling" feature that is not only reflected in the message of human equality for which these movements stood, but is also captured in the nature of the arguments used to undermine the claim to superiority of those occupying exalted positions. Substantial parts of early Buddhist and Jain literatures contain expositions of protest and resistance.

Movements against caste divisions that have figured repeatedly in Indian history, with varying degrees of success, have made good use of arguments to question orthodox beliefs. Many of these counter-arguments are recorded in the epics, indicating that opposition to hierarchy was not absent even in the early days of caste arrangements. We do not know whether the authors to whom the skeptical arguments are attributed were the real originators of the doubts expressed or mere vehicles of already established questioning; but the prominence of these arguments for equality in the epics (as well as in other classical documents) gives us a fuller insight into the reach of the argumentative tradition than a monolithic exposition of the so-called "Hindu point of view" can possibly provide.

When, in the *Mahabharata*, Bhṛigu tells Bharadvaja that caste divisions relate to differences in physical attributes of different human beings, reflected in skin color, Bharadvaja responds not only by pointing to the considerable variations in skin color within every caste ("if different colors indicate different castes, then all castes are mixed castes"), but also with a more profound question: "We all seem to be affected by desire, anger, fear, sorrow, worry, hunger, and labor; how do we have caste differences then?" There is also a genealogical skepticism expressed in another old document, the *Bhavisya Purana*: "Since members of all the four castes are children of God, they all belong to the same

caste. All human beings have the same father, and children of the same father cannot have different castes." These doubts do not win the day, but their expression was not obliterated in the classical account of the debates.

In dealing with issues of contemporary inequality, the relevance of the tradition of argument must be examined in terms of the contribution it can make today in resisting and undermining the inequities that characterize so much of contemporary Indian society. It would be a great mistake to assume that the argumentative tradition must generally favor the privileged and the well-educated, rather than the dispossessed and the deprived. Some of the most powerful disputes in Indian intellectual history have in fact been about the lives of the least privileged groups, which have drawn on the substantive force of these claims, rather than on the cultivated brilliance of well-trained dialectics.

III.

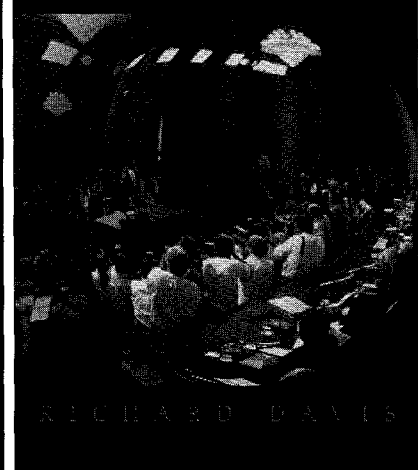
DOES THE RICHNESS OF THE tradition of argument make much difference to subcontinental lives today? I believe that it does, and in many different ways. It shapes our social world and the nature of our culture. It has helped to make heterodoxy the natural state of affairs in India: persistent arguments are an important part of our public life. It deeply influences Indian politics, and it is particularly relevant, I think, to the development of democracy in India and the emergence of its secular priorities.

The historical roots of democracy in India are well worth considering, if only because the connection with public argument is often missed, through the temptation to attribute the Indian commitment to democracy simply to the impact of British influence. (Surely such an influence should have worked similarly for a hundred other countries that emerged from an empire on which the sun used not to set.) Yet the point at issue is not specific to India only: in general, the tradition of public reasoning is closely related to the roots of democracy across the globe. But since India has been especially fortunate in having a long tradition of public arguments, with respect for intellectual heterodoxy, this general connection has been particularly effective in India. When, more than half a century ago, independent India became the first

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country in the non-Western world to choose a resolutely democratic constitution, it not only used what it had learned from the institutional experiences in Europe (particularly Great Britain) and America, it also drew on its own tradition of public reasoning and argumentative heterodoxy.

India's unusual record as a robust non-Western democracy includes not just its popular endorsement, following independence from the British Raj, of the democratic form of government, but also the tenacious persistence of that system, in contrast to many other countries where democracy has made only intermittent cameo appearances. It includes the comprehensive acceptance by the armed forces (differently from the military in many other countries in Asia and Africa) as well as by the political parties (from the communist left to the Hindu right) of the priority of civilian rule, no matter how inefficient and awkward (and temptingly replaceable) democratic governance might seem.

The decisive experiences in India also include the unequivocal rejection by the Indian electorate of a very prominent attempt in the 1970s to dilute democratic guarantees in India, on the ground of the alleged "emergency" that India then faced. The officially sponsored proposal was massively rebuffed in the polls in 1977. Even though Indian democracy remains imperfect and flawed, the ways and means of overcoming those faults can draw powerfully on the argumentational tradition.

It is important to avoid the twin pitfalls of taking democracy to be just a gift of the Western world that India simply accepted when it became independent, and assuming that there is something unique in Indian history that makes the country singularly suited to democracy. The point is that democracy is intimately connected with public discussion and interactive reasoning. Traditions of public discussion exist across the world, not just in the West; and to the extent that such a tradition can be drawn on, democracy becomes easier to institute and to preserve. Public reasoning includes the opportunity for citizens to participate in political discussions and to influence public choice. Balloting can be seen as only one of the ways—albeit a very important way—to make public discussions effective, when the opportunity to vote is combined with the opportunity to speak and listen without fear. The reach—and

the effectiveness—of voting depends critically on the opportunity for open public discussion.

THE GREEK AND ROMAN HERITAGE of public discussion is rightly celebrated, but the importance attached to public deliberation also has a remarkable history in India. As it happens, even the world-conquering Alexander received some political lecturing as he roamed around northwest India in the fourth century B.C.E. When he asked a group of Jain philosophers why they were paying so little attention to the great conqueror, he received this broadly anti-imperial reply (as reported by Arrian):

King Alexander, every man can possess only so much of the earth's surface as this we are standing on. You are but human like the rest of us, save that you are always busy and up to no good, traveling so many miles from your home, a nuisance to yourself and to others! ... You will soon be dead, and then you will own just as much of the earth as will suffice to bury you.

In the history of public reasoning in India, considerable credit must be given to the early Indian Buddhists, who had a great commitment to discussion as a means of social progress. That commitment produced, among other results, some of the earliest open general meetings in the world. The so-called "Buddhist councils," which aimed at settling disputes between different points of view, drew delegates from different places and from different schools of thought. The first of the four principal councils was held in Rajagriha shortly after Gautama Buddha's death in the sixth century B.C.E.; the second about a century later in Vaishali; and the last in Kashmir in the second century C.E. But the largest and the best known of these councils occurred under the patronage of Emperor Ashoka in the third century B.C.E., in Pataliputra (now called Patna). These councils were primarily concerned with resolving differences in religious principles and practices, but they also addressed the demands of social and civic duties, and helped in a general way to consolidate and promote the tradition of open discussion on contentious issues.

The association of Ashoka, who ruled over the bulk of the Indian subcontinent (stretching into what is now Afghani-

stan), with the largest of these councils is of particular interest, since he was strongly committed to making sure that public discussion could take place without animosity or violence. Ashoka tried to codify and to propagate what must have been among the earliest formulations of rules for public discussion—a kind of ancient version of *Robert's Rules of Order*. He demanded, for example, "restraint in regard to speech, so that there should be no extolment of one's own sect or disparagement of other sects on inappropriate occasions, and it should be moderate even on appropriate occasions." Even when engaged in arguing, "other sects should be duly honored in every way on all occasions."

Ashoka's championing of public discussion had echoes in the later history of India, but none perhaps as strong as the Moghul emperor Akbar's sponsorship and support for dialogues between adherents of different faiths, nearly two thousand years later. Akbar's overarching thesis that "the pursuit of reason" rather than "reliance on tradition" was the way to address difficult problems of social harmony included a robust celebration of reasoned dialogues. A royal sponsorship is not essential for the practice of public reasoning, but it adds another dimension to the reach of the argumentative history of India. In the deliberative conception of democracy, the role of open discussion, with or without sponsorship by the state, has a clear relevance. While democracy must also demand much else, public reasoning, which is central to participatory governance, is an important part of the bigger picture.

IV.

THE LONG HISTORY OF HETERODOXY not only has a bearing on the development and the survival of democracy in India, it has also richly contributed to the emergence of secularism in India, and even to the form that Indian secularism takes, which is not exactly how it is defined in parts of the West. The tolerance of religious diversity is implicitly reflected in India's having served over the centuries as a shared home for Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs, Baha'is, and others. The Vedas, which date back at least to the middle of the second millennium B.C.E., paved the way to what is now

called Hinduism. (That term was devised much later by Persians and Arabs, after the river Sindhu or Indus.) Buddhism and Jainism had both emerged by the sixth century B.C.E. Buddhism, the practice of which is now rather sparse in India, was the dominant religion of the country for nearly a thousand years. Jainism, born at the same time as Buddhism, has survived as a powerful Indian religion over two and a half millennia.

Jews came to India, it appears, shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, though there are other theories about earlier arrivals of the community. Jewish arrivals continued in later waves, in the fifth and sixth centuries from southern Arabia and Persia until the last wave of Baghdadi Jews from Iraq and Syria, mostly to Bombay and Calcutta, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Christians, too, came very early, and by the fourth century there were large Christian communities in what is now Kerala. Parsees started to arrive in the late seventh century, as soon as the persecution of Zoroastrianism began in Persia. The Baha'is were among the last groups to seek refuge in India, in the last century. Over this long period there were other migrations, including the settlement of Muslim Arab traders, which began on India's western coast in the eighth century, well before the invasions that came from other Muslim countries via the more warlike north-western routes. There were in addition many conversions, especially to Islam. Each religious community managed to retain its identity within India's multi-religious spectrum.

The toleration of diversity has been explicitly defended by strong arguments in favor of the richness of social and cultural variation, including fulsome praise of the need to interact with each other, in mutual respect, through dialogue. Ashoka wanted a general agreement on the need to conduct arguments with "restraint in regard to speech": "a person must not do reverence to his own sect or disparage the beliefs of another without reason." He went on to argue: "Deprecation should be for specific reasons only, because the sects of other people all deserve reverence for one reason or another." The early Indian emperor supplemented this general moral and political principle by a dialectical argument based on enlightened self-interest: "For he who does reverence to his own sect while disparaging the sects of others wholly from attachment to his own sect,

in reality inflicts, by such conduct, the severest injury on his own sect."

CENTURIES LATER, THE MOGHUL emperor Akbar not only made unequivocal pronouncements on the priority of tolerance, but also laid the formal foundations of a secular legal structure and of the religious neutrality of the state, which included the duty to ensure that "no man should be interfered with on account of religion, and anyone is to be allowed to go over to a religion that pleases him." Despite his deep interest in other religions and his brief attempt to launch a new religion known as *Din-ilahi*, or "God's religion," based on a combination of elements from different faiths, Akbar remained a Muslim himself. Indeed, when he died in 1605, the Islamic theologian Abdul Haq, who had been quite critical of Akbar's lapses from orthodoxy, concluded with some satisfaction that, despite his "innovations," Akbar had remained a proper Muslim.

The meetings that Akbar arranged in the late sixteenth century for public dialogue included Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, Jains, Jews, and even atheists. While the historical background of Indian secularism can be traced to the trend of thinking that had begun to take root well before Akbar, the politics of secularism received a tremendous boost from Akbar's championing of pluralist ideals, along with his insistence that the state should be completely impartial between different religions. His own policies reflected his pluralist commitments, such as his insistence on filling his court with non-Muslim intellectuals and artists (including the great Hindu musician Tansen) in addition to Muslim ones, and, rather remarkably, by his trusting a Hindu former king—Raja Man Singh, whom he had defeated—to serve as the general commander of his armed forces.

The tolerance of variety in different walks of life has also had other (if less regal) support throughout Indian history—in Sanskrit drama, with its criticism and ridicule of narrow-minded persecution, as in Shudraka's *Mricchakatikam*, or *The Little Clay Cart*, and *Mudraraksasam*, or *The Signet of the Minister*; and in Sanskrit poetry and its celebration of diversity, perhaps most elegantly in Kalidasa's *Meghadutam*, or *The Cloud Messenger*, which applauds the beauty of varieties of human customs and behavior through the imagined eyes of a cloud that carries

a message of longing from a banished husband to his beloved wife, as the cloud slowly journeys across fifth-century India. A similar commitment to accepting—and exalting—diversity can be seen in many other writings, from the prose and poetry of Amir Khusrau, a Muslim scholar and poet in the fourteenth century, to the rich culture of nonsectarian religious poetry that flourished from around that time, drawing on both Hindu (particularly Bhakti) and Muslim (particularly Sufi) traditions. Inter-religious tolerance is a persistent theme in the poetry of Kabir, Dadu, Ravi-das, Sena, and others, a circle that included a number of distinguished women poets, such as the remarkable Mira Bai in the sixteenth century.

SECULARISM IN CONTEMPORARY India, which received legislative articulation in the post-independence constitution of the Indian Republic, contains strong influences of Indian intellectual history, including the championing of intellectual pluralism. One reflection of this historical connection is that Indian secularism takes a somewhat different form and makes rather different demands from the more austere Western versions such as the French interpretation of secularism,

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which is supposed to prohibit even personal display of religious symbols or conventions in state institutions at work.

There are two principal approaches to secularism, focusing respectively on state neutrality between different religions and the prohibition of religious associations in state activities. Indian secularism has tended to emphasize neutrality in particular, rather than prohibition in general. It is the prohibitory aspect that has been the central issue in the recent French decision to ban the wearing of headscarves by Muslim women students in public schools, on the ground that it violates secularism; but it can be argued that such a prohibition could not be justified specifically on grounds of secularism, if we accept the "neutrality" interpretation of secularism that has powerfully emerged in India. The secular demand that the state be "equidistant" from different religions (including agnosticism and atheism) need not disallow any person individually—irrespective of his or her religion—from deciding what to wear, so long as members of different faiths are treated symmetrically.

The immediate issue here is not so much whether the French ban is the wrong policy. It could be justified for some reason other than its alleged violation of secularism—for example, on the grounds that the headscarves are symbols of gender inequality and can be seen as demeaning to women, or that women (especially young girls) do not really have the freedom to decide what to wear, and that dress decisions are imposed on them by more powerful male family members. Those can be important concerns, but they are distinct from the demands of secularism itself. The point here is that the banning of an individual's freedom to choose what to wear cannot be justified on the ground of secularism as such when that principle is interpreted in terms of the need for the state to be neutral between the different faiths. Being equidistant between different religions does involve a rejection of favoring one religion over another, and this could be taken to imply that state schools should not follow an asymmetrical policy of brandishing symbols from one religion while excluding others; but it need not rule against the freedom of each person individually to make his or her own sartorial decisions, which others should be willing to respect. As Ashoka put it in the third century B.C.E.: "Con-

cord, therefore, is meritorious, to wit, hearkening and hearkening *willingly* to the Law of Piety as accepted by other people." Again, the form as well as the interpretation of secularism in India can be linked to the history of the acceptance of heterodoxy.

V.

THE LONG TRADITION OF ARGUING also has considerable bearing on the reading of India's past and its impact upon the present. Recognizing the history of heterodoxy in India is critically important for an adequate understanding of the Indian traditions that have survived the turmoil of Indian history. Let me illustrate this with the question of the status and relevance of religion in India, in particular the need to understand the long heritage of religious skepticism in India.

The powerful presence of religious skepticism in India appears to go against an exceedingly common characterization of Indian culture that focuses particularly on religion in interpreting Indian traditions. The religious connection is certainly there: it is indeed the case that India has a massive religious literature, perhaps more voluminous than any other country's. This is among the reasons for associating the understanding of Indian civilization with religiosity, not merely at the level of popular practice but also at the level of intellectual engagement. As A. C. Bouquet, an accomplished expert on comparative religion, has pointed out, "India in particular furnishes within its limits examples of every conceivable type of attempt at the solution of the religious problem."

But this is not the whole story. These grand explorations of every possible religious belief co-exist with deeply skeptical arguments that are also elaborately explored, sometimes within the religious texts themselves. This skepticism goes back all the way to the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. The so-called "song of creation" (or "creation hymn") in the authoritative Rig-Veda ends with the following radical doubts:

Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen? Whence this creation has arisen—perhaps it

formed itself, or perhaps it did not—the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows—or perhaps he does not know.

These 3,500-year-old doubts would recur in Indian intellectual debates again and again. Sanskrit not only has a bigger body of religious literature than any other classical language, it also has a larger volume of agnostic or atheistic writings than any other classical language.

INDIAN TEXTS INCLUDE ELABORATE religious expositions and protracted defense, and also lengthy and sustained debates among different religious schools. But there are, in addition, a great many controversies between defenders of religiosity and advocates of philosophical skepticism. The doubts sometimes take the form of agnosticism, sometimes that of atheism, but there is also Gautama Buddha's special strategy of combining his theoretical skepticism about God with a practical subversion of the significance of the question by making the choice of good behavior completely independent of any god—real or imagined. Indeed, different forms of godlessness have had a strong following throughout Indian history, as they do today.

The "Lokayata" philosophy of skepticism and materialism flourished from the first millennium B.C.E., possibly even in Buddha's own time (judging from some references in the early Buddhist literature), some two and a half millennia ago. There is even some evidence of the influence of that line of thinking in the *Upanishads*. Atheism and materialism continued to attract adherents and advocates over many centuries, and were increasingly associated with the exposition of the intellectually combative Carvaka. In the fourteenth century, when Madhava Acarya (himself a Vedantist Hindu) wrote his authoritative *Sarvadarshana-samgraha* or *Collection of All Philosophies*, the "Carvaka system" had the distinction of receiving an elaborately sympathetic defense in the first chapter of the compilation, consisting of a reasoned defense of atheism and materialism. After being expounded and defended in the first chapter, the atheistic claims are subjected to counter-arguments in the following chapter, in line with the dialectical strategy of the book.

The exposition of the Carvaka system begins with a strong assertion: "How can we attribute to the Divine Being the giv-

ing of supreme facility, when such a notion has been utterly demolished by Carvaka, the crest-gem of the atheistic school?" In addition to the denial of God, there is also a rejection of the soul and an assertion of the material basis of the mind: "[from these material elements] alone, when transformed into the body, intelligence is produced, just as the inebriating power is developed from the mixing of certain ingredients; and when these are destroyed, intelligence at once perishes also." Along with these radical beliefs about the nature of life and mind, there is also a philosophy of value, which concentrates on identifiable pleasure, not any "happiness in a future world." There is recurrent advice on how to live: "While life is yours, live joyously!" And there is an acrid and cynical explanation of the cultivated survival of religious illusions among people: "There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in another world... it is only as a means of livelihood that Brahmins have established here all the ceremonies for the dead—there is no other fruit anywhere."

The active presence of atheism and materialism continued through the regimes of Muslim kings. Indeed, even in the late sixteenth century, when the Moghul emperor Akbar held his multi-religious dialogic encounters in Agra, the Carvaka school of atheism was well represented among the alternative positions that were selected for presentation (as Akbar's adviser and chronicler Abul Fazl noted). In philosophical discourses throughout Indian history, atheists and skeptics make frequent appearances, and are allowed their say.

An adequately inclusive understanding of the history of Indian heterodoxy is particularly important because of the relative neglect of the rationalist parts of the Indian heritage in contemporary accounts of India's past, in favor of a concentration on India's vast religiosity. That selective inattention has produced a substantial bias in the interpretation of Indian thought, and therefore in the understanding of the intellectual heritage of contemporary India. The exaggerated focus on religiosity has contributed to an underestimation of the reach of public reasoning in India and the diversity

Distribution

It might be anything: cowries, eggs, pigs, hoes. In Bangalore, they use dry fruit, in Iceland,

dried fish—a horse shoe for one fish, a pair of woman's shoes for three, casket of butter for

one-hundred twenty. The paper dollar on my desk has value because we think it does.

The antelope against the barren hills is running across the field because we think it is.

Satellites hang in space to spy on the French man tilling his field, the Russian man filling jam jars

with florets of fruit, the Chinese man opening his palm of starfish. A science experiment gone

according to plan, the laboratory—us. The problem: one earth, one football field, one home

in the suburbs, too many of us. What if there is not enough grass to trample, and the rain never cleans

the streets, just pushes things around, like a broom sweeping in a room with no door?

VICTORIA CHANG

of its coverage—for example, Kautilya's classic treatise on political economy and governance, *Arthashastra* (translatable as *Economics*), initially composed in the fourth century B.C.E., is basically a secular treatise, despite the respectful gestures it makes to religious and social customs. And further, this neglect has led also to an unfortunate devaluation of the long and rich traditions of Indian science and mathematics.

VI.

TO RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE of the heritage of argument and the history of heterodoxy does not do away with the need to look at the impact of other influences on India's development, nor does it obviate the necessity of investigating the interactions of different influences. My particular focus on heterodoxy and loquaciousness is not so much to elevate the role of tradition in the evolution of India, but to seek a fuller reading of Indian traditions, which have interacted with other factors in the dynamism of In-

dian society and culture.

Consider the relevance of ongoing traditions for the development of democracy. In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela notes that as a young boy he learned about the importance of democracy from the practice of the local African meetings that were held in the regent's house in Mqhekezweni:

Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, but everyone was heard, chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and laborer.... The foundation of self-government was that all men were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens.

In arguing that his "long walk to freedom" began at home, Mandela was not claiming that nothing else mattered in taking him toward the fight for democracy, nor that democracy would have no relevance to South Africa had its social heritage been different.

But the traditions that Mandela saw at home were, for him, momentous; and since the precursors of the democratic mentality in Africa had been fairly widely neglected in discussions on politics and colonial history, it was particularly important for Mandela to bring out the role of Africa's historical traditions.

Heterodoxy has been championed in many different ways throughout Indian history, and the argumentative tradition remains very much alive today. This tradition has received understanding and support from many of the modern leaders of India—not only political leaders such as Gandhi, but also people in other walks of life, such as the great poet and writer Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore, who was proud of the fact that his family background reflected "a confluence of three cultures, Hindu, Mohammedan, and British," emphasized the need to be vigilant in defense of this open-minded tradition and to help it to flower more fully. Like Akbar's championing of "the path of reason," Tagore emphasized the role of deliberation and reasoning as the foundation of a good society:

Where the mind is without fear and
the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been
broken up into fragments by
narrow domestic walls; ...
Where the clear stream of reason has
not lost its way into the dreary
desert sand of dead habit; ...
Into that heaven of freedom, my
Father, let my country awake.

The long history and consummate strength of India's argumentative tradition, which we have reason to celebrate and to defend, can also be a strong ally of the underdog, particularly in the context of democratic practice. Voices of dissent have often made it across barriers of caste, class, and gender, and they have not been entirely ineffective. But it is the intermediation of democratic politics that makes the voices of dissent particularly effective in practical affairs. The high proportion of women in leadership positions in Indian nationalist politics and in the post-independence period reflects a combination of Indian women's ability to use their voice and the actual opportunities of public politics (as it happens, originally within the colonial system of the British Raj, in the form of a national movement *against* it).

And something similar can be said about the involvement of political leaders from disadvantaged classes and castes in Indian politics today. There were powerful counter-arguments to the caste system in early disputations. Yet the practical impact of such criticisms of social practice can be relatively ineffective unless they are expressed in a politically effective voice and in constructive public discussions.

I end on a positive (if somewhat light-hearted) note, by recollecting a poem by the nineteenth-century Bengali writer Ram Mohun Roy, in which he explains what is really dreadful about death: "Just consider how terrible the day of your death will be. Others will go on speaking, and you will not be able to argue back." Such is our loquacious culture, we are told, that the real hardship of death consists in the inability to argue. There is an interesting philosophical vision behind this extraordinary diagnosis. The demands of justice in India are also demands for more use of voice in the pursuit of equity. Silence is a powerful enemy of social justice. ■

Christine Stansell America the Ruthless

**BORN LOSERS: A HISTORY OF
FAILURE IN AMERICA**
By Scott A. Sandage
(Harvard University Press,
362 pp., \$35)

YOU MIGHT APPROACH A book about losers with a certain hauteur. And Scott A. Sandage's opening anecdote about an unidentified loser who died in 1862 lends itself to your hunch that his book is going to be a dutiful trudge through a gallery of garden-variety failures. "I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition," a friend grieved at the man's funeral. That's page one. On page two you find out that the slacker was Henry David Thoreau, the scolding elegist Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Ah, but that's Thoreau, and he famously marched to a different drummer. But the Harvard man tried one occupation after another and nothing ever stuck. His friend Emerson thought that his promising beginning had come to nothing. Thoreau himself was never given to self-doubt, but how many of us possess his steely fortitude? "The promise of America is that nobody is a born loser," Sandage observes, "but who has never wondered, 'Am I wasting my life?'"

Sandage's book is a rich and fascinating exposition of how failure, once deemed an accident of fortune, has been turned into an ontological category, an explanation of fate based on an essence of the individual, an intangible identity bequeathed at birth. It is a harsh and cruel judgment, usually disguised as condescension or pity. For children and teenagers, it is a taunt—"Loser!"—that consigns the designee to hell. As Sandage shows, however, it is actually a relatively new way to describe a particular mix of ill fortune and impecuniousness. Failure has changed from something that happens to a person—"going broke," "going bust"—to something that a person is: "a name for a deficient self, an identity in the red."

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Sandage begins by picking apart responses to the successive "panics," or financial crashes, that structured the life chances of ordinary Americans throughout the nineteenth century. The business cycle churned out a disaster every twenty years or so: 1819, 1837, 1857–1858, 1871–1872, 1893. Few people other than historians know about these panics, because none of them was as catastrophic as the crash of 1929. But at the time, a young nation, at once buoyed by myths of its abundance and assailed by knowledge of its sins, saw in each bust the need to resolve the ancient question: by what logic or plan were some blessed by fortune and others cursed?

Each downturn narrowed and rigidified the American answer. As a national economic system developed that was heavily dependent on British investors and New York banks, the fate of a Missouri farmer or an Alabama slave or a Boston ship carpenter came partly to depend on the vicissitudes of businessmen on a few streets in lower Manhattan. Living through collapses of credit and prices precipitated by mysterious distant events, people struggled to parse the relations between morality, labor, well-being, and moneymaking. Were men responsible for their own failures? Did those who failed deserve to fail? Was ruin a punishment of vice, or was it morally neutral, the result only of bad choices? An older Calvinist sense of calling, which prized vocation as one path among others to salvation and condemned the sin of pride, gave way to a conviction that the financially successful life, the happy life, and the moral life were all felicitously bound up in one neat package of righteous ambition.

Sandage draws out the paradox: the fantastical constructions of virtue's rewards depended on reconstructing failure as a moral verdict. The self-made man depended for his get-up-and-go on the broken man. Melville's *Bartleby*, the wan clerk, is the most famous of a throng of failures who haunted antebellum literature: the drunkards, scoundrels, and wastrels of moral reform tracts; the pitiable beggars, cripples, and kindly gentle-

men of reduced circumstances in sentimental fiction.

The country's love of words generated an intricate vocabulary to capture those shades of character that condemned men to ruin. Sandage's inventory, circa 1840, includes humbugs, suckers, flunkies, mopers, lookers-on, old-womanish men, too-honest men, broken men, makeshift men. The first generation of self-help books—such as *How to Get Money: Or, Eleven Ways of Making a Fortune*—hawked nostrums to save readers from the loser's fate: advice on achieving “personal magnetism” and strategies for “getting along,” which increasingly, as the country recovered from the devastating downturn in 1837, meant “getting ahead.”

THE NEXT UPSWING CREATED A generation of young men, the “go-ahead boys” of the 1840s and 1850s, who thought that they had learned from their failed elders what to avoid. Their fathers were content to stake a competency in life, so as to “get along.” But the calamity of 1837 showed that getting along tolerably could turn a man into a sucker. Now a young man on the make intended to “go ahead; be something; make a pile, and make your mark.”

The go-ahead boys were formed, economically, by Western land speculation, the cotton boom and the internal slave trade, canal and railroad building sprees, and the expansion of commercial markets. They operated within a byzantine and punitive legal system. Many states had banished debtor's prison by the time the panic of 1837 struck, but a welter of laws remained that could bar insolvent individuals—but not corporations or speculators—from bankruptcy proceedings that canceled their debts.

Thus going broke could entail a life sentence to pay off past mistakes. The shadow of perpetual servitude to debts contracted in better times—the chasm that awaited the decent man should he fall out of favor with creditors—fostered a temperament of chronic, anxious self-searching among the go-ahead boys. At moments of self-disclosure, they accused themselves of laziness or guilelessness or setting the bar too low. “Just think of such a sucker as me as president!” remarked Abraham Lincoln, a man of the go-ahead generation and a perennial loser at the polls, in 1858 in the Senate race against

Stephen A. Douglas (a race that he lost).

Credit, speculation, debt: the spreading net of confidence created a need for confidential reporting on men's trustworthiness. The nation's first credit-rating agencies opened in the 1840s in New York, close to the banks and merchants who needed the information. The agencies invented a lexicon of succinct ratings to sum up a man: “dead beat” (when suing for payment was as pointless as flogging a dead horse), “bad risk,” “a great loser,” “good for nothing”—or the triumphant “A no. 1.” Comically useless in grasping the value of any life, such judgments nonetheless registered as probity in a society fixated on the stark oppositions of credit and debit, gain and loss.

In their power to dictate whether credit was extended or withheld, the bleak ratings shaped the lives they squashed into a Gradgrindian word or two. A “great loser” might be a man such as Solomon Andrews, whose “failed” career Sandage delicately excavates. A physician and scientist, Andrews treated the poor in the New York cholera epidemic of 1832 and then extrapolated his observations of the role played by contaminated groundwater to a design for the first sewer system in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. He served as a government official, both elected and appointed: mayor for two terms and customs collector at Perth Amboy's port. He was an inventor who tried to found an American institute for inventors, and he was the originator of the first airship that could fly against the wind. Too “eccentric” and “unsafe to trust,” Andrews could never get the credit he needed to make a go of his inventions. He was a good, useful, upstanding, and accomplished man, but in the agency books he was “good for nothing.”

SANDAGE'S IDEA IS BIG AND compelling, an axis along which he can align many disparate elements, from bankruptcy law to *Moby-Dick* (a book about a go-ahead Yankee in extremis). But there is much that he leaves out. He writes only offhandedly about religion, when a major source of can-do ideology was the Second Great Awakening, the series of Protestant revivals that crested in the 1830s and gathered in flocks of exactly the strivers who fascinate Sandage. In stressing individuals' power to work for their own salvation, the revivals imported the profit/loss calculus into the realm of the spirit. In a society saturated with

churchliness and religiosity, Christianity's traditional proffer of comfort for the poor and suffering was strictly reserved for the born losers.

At times, the power of his idea tempts Sandage to wrench his material into line. The middle chapters of his book, about the credit agencies, get bogged down in a labored argument about “surveillance,” an idea of Michel Foucault's that, thanks to our new era of homeland security, is enjoying a vogue in cultural studies. Foucault treated liberal society as totalitarian in its own way, an invisible system of police powers diffused through language and culture, rather than concentrated in any one agency of control.

Sandage uses the model as a jumping-off point to portray lower Manhattan's business district in the 1840s as a hub of identity control, with New York's daguerreotype studios and phrenologists (who inferred clues to a person's character from the shape of his skull) pitching in to pinpoint and sell identity: “never before and nowhere on earth (let alone within a short walk) had a cluster of businesses shared the goal of observing, recording, and selling the distinctive traits of individuals.” It's a big stretch. Sandage's argument depends on superficial resemblances in the language of the three kinds of businesses and the fact that they were located close to one another. But then everything was close together in the small commercial district of antebellum Manhattan. The idea of surveillance may lend academic portent, but it burdens Sandage's history with anachronism and lures him into going on too long.

Even Walt Whitman, a self-proclaimed idler and loafer, gets caught up in the Foucauldian dragnet. For the crime of cruising on Broadway and having his daguerreotype taken, Sandage jerks him from his lyrical rounds and throws him into a lineup of surveillance

GOD LIBERTARIANISM

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experts. Sandage wrestles Whitman's bil-lowy omniscience ("I see and hear you, and what you give and take") and his mysticism about the connection of the things of this world to those of the next ("objects gross and the unseen soul are one") into a framework of "commodity and identity": "Even as he tried to lure readers to another country, the poet's distinctively omniscient tone recalled the enterprises of Broadway and Nassau Street."

The tone-deafness shows up in the book's discussion of Lincoln, too, where Sandage's command of verbal nuance, elsewhere so striking, fails him. This is partly a result of his penchant for phrasing that reaches for cleverness: thus the Civil War becomes the "War for Ambition" and Lincoln's "new birth of freedom" is really a vision of a nation of strivers. This Great Emancipator is not too far removed from the old Charles Beard progressive vision of Lincoln as an avatar of bourgeois sensibility.

The muckraking readings are not wrong, exactly (Lincoln's great faith in the country was built on the rock of free labor), but they do not take you anywhere near an adequate understanding of the war or of Lincoln—or, for that matter, of conflicts over slavery and freedom. Sandage's indifference to religious belief blinds him to the deeper sources and resonances of Lincoln's vision of what the end of the war would bring to black and white alike. The conflict that left more than six hundred thousand dead and the largest slave society in the world shattered did not take place because North and South disagreed on how to get ahead. Lincoln was not murdered because John Wilkes Booth had bad credit.

BUT WHEN SANDAGE RETURNS to his prized subjects, the born losers, he regains his stride. Examining how American culture seeps into the American soul (or at least one kind of white soul), he produces an eloquent and sensitive account of how the country's freedom and hopefulness paradoxically drove some toward self-torment and self-loathing. His last section and the epilogue describe failure ideology at full flower in the forty years before the Great Depression. By the 1890s, the tyrannical dichotomy was branded into American sensibility. "Even more than they had in antebellum America," Sandage writes, "the self-made man and the broken man represented the poles of an ideology of

manhood based on achieved identity—the conviction that all men earned their fates and thus deserved whatever credit or disgrace they accrued."

The terrible depression of 1893—when *Sister Carrie's* Hurstwood, once a mover and shaker in Chicago, drifted down through layers of ever cheaper lodgings to land in a Bowery flophouse—drove respectable men to compose desperate "begging letters" to robber-baron successes. John D. Rockefeller received as many as fifteen thousand a week in 1894. He saved some of them, creating a trove of failure stories buried in the family archives. It is a measure of Sandage's extraordinary imagination—and his excellent scholarly training—that he should have even found this extraordinary evidence. Sources like these do not just jump out at a writer on the prowl. The archive of letters to Rockefeller marks the point at which cultural meanings poured into the recesses of the soul, an elusive location for any historian to track down. Sandage uses the letters to trace the currents and eddies of pride, self-reproach, and bitterness in the sensibilities of those about to go under. "The intimacy of the letters was exceeded only by their lack of originality: beggars from Des Moines, Brooklyn, and New Orleans wrote the same things, in almost the same order, pouring what they must have felt as unique heartbreak into relentlessly formulaic letters."

Formulaic they may be, but Sandage understands that banality is a primary expression of humanity. He penetrates the generic to find the unique core of suffering in the pleas, where men balanced their existential accounts of themselves. One sixty-seven-year-old failure, who had crossed Dun and Bradstreet's path in 1879 as an "honest, honorable man," ended up ten years later pleading with Rockefeller for a loan. While he cited his bona fides as a striver, Sandage observes, the man nonetheless bitterly resented the ideology that drove him without respite. "I have been Struggling incessantly," he wrote the tycoon. "Not because I am an imbecile, shiftless, lazy, listlessly, loafing about, no, not a bit of it, but the reverse is true. I am worried to death."

LOSERS ARE MAKING A COMEBACK these days, at least on television. *Stella's* three weirdos, dressed impeccably in business suits that have no bearing on their actual lives as unemployed layabouts, create a

delectable mixture of slapstick, incompetence, and penury topped off by an unflappable yuppie lordliness utterly impervious to the trio's worldly standing as sad sacks. Lisa Kudrow works a vein of pathetic dignity in *The Comeback*, where she plays a middle-aged actress, once a hot number in a *Friends*-like comedy, reduced to starring in a second-string reality show that follows the now frumpy middle-aged has-been in her comeback role in a second-string sitcom as a frumpy middle-aged foil to a bevy of starlets. And *Entourage*, a sharp comic inquiry into Hollywood's ruthless worship of winning, features the unabashed loser Turtle, who cheerfully depends on Vince, his movie-star buddy, for rent, food, and cash. Johnny Drama, Vince's wounded and ludicrous half brother, tags along too, a failed actor convinced that calf implants will bring him the success that has always eluded him.

But all these shows have to struggle against a gravitational field of viewers' impatience. Sympathizing with losers may be possible, but admiring them is not. In our America, we are too much in thrall to winners to identify with losers for more than a few episodes. It takes the Marx Brothers' aplomb laced with malice, or Woody Allen's erstwhile ability to conjure up the schlemiel, or Chaplin's angelic composure, to overcome an audience's incipient irritation at seeing someone screw up or humiliate himself too many times. The classic comic losers carried audiences along with them because they kicked free of the winners with such efficiency, such freedom, and left them, metaphorically or actually, in the dust. In the new failure shows, the losers can never kick the winners in the pants. Inwardly, they are never really free. These figures are supposed to be funny, but after a while they are dispiriting. Is this really the best that the talented Lisa Kudrow can do these days—stage herself as a middle-aged actress who can't get herself a life and hope that this is funny enough to be a success?

AT ITS BEST, *BORN LOSERS* is an angry and mournful book, although its emotional pitch is muted. The tone is just right. Rooted in an American studies tradition, Sandage often returns to an older strain of probing moral criticism of the country. This is the sort of deeply critical and deeply caring book that is too seldom seen in cultural studies. He does not write

in the pity-the-poor way; he is not urging us to give alms. But you cannot come away from this elegant book without a heightened awareness of the devastating costs of the go-ahead mandate for the downsized corporate executive, the bank teller denied a promotion year after year, the college graduate struggling to spring loose of internships to land a real job. As Sandage points out, we readily remember Willy Loman, the “doomed striver” whom Arthur Miller burned into the country’s imagination in *Death of a Salesman*, but we seldom recall the lacerating monologue that Loman’s wife delivers about the man’s value. “And you tell me he has no character?” she demands of their sons. “The man who never worked a day but for your benefit? When does he get the medal for that?” Working every day (or going out every day to find a job where you can work every day) should count, by any decent measure, as making your mark.

But our views of work descend directly from the 1850s: these are only ways to get along “tolerably,” a step removed from being a sucker or a “looker-on.” It’s no wonder that we have before Congress the most punitive bankruptcy bill in the nation’s history, which (as this magazine has rightly argued) will wipe out a second chance for debtors just as the old

antebellum state laws did. In Bush’s America, the Reaganite revival of the Gospel of Wealth has coarsened into government’s open servility to business. For the bill’s proponents, desperate debtors (a recent Harvard study found that people filing for bankruptcy are typically swamped by some combination of unemployment and medical expenses) are invisible, transformed into clever villains who rip off the credit-card companies to throw around borrowed cash on fancy watches and designer clothes. Those who now rule America seem to believe that bad things happen only to bad people, that personal misfortune is a sign of personal irresponsibility.

In the weeks after September 11, the pages and pages of *New York Times* obituaries unforgettably summed up the victims in a terse, eloquent paragraph or two: not many more words than a credit report. Hundreds of lives were laid out in columns, the only gravestones they had. There were bowlers and Girl Scout leaders and karaoke singers; great dancers; beloved uncles and aunts; women planning big trips abroad and men planning big trips back home. There were winners, obviously, and there must have been losers, too. But the remarkable thing was that, for a moment at least, you couldn’t tell the winners and the losers apart. ■

Whitman famously aimed to be a poet of inclusion—“I have offer’d my style to everyone”—but there is little evidence of his spontaneity, what the poet also called his “audacity,” in Cunningham’s strait-laced prose, which the novelist here constricts to the conventions of genre literature. (A sentence chosen almost at random from the police procedural: “Pete stopped en route in the lunchroom for a cup of late-day, bottom-of-the-pot coffee sludge, with four Equals.” We have read this many times before.) Whitman’s main influence on this novel is revealed, rather, in the snippets of poems that Cunningham imports wholesale into his characters’ mouths. They are peculiarly obsessed with Whitman, spouting him constantly and involuntarily, like Tourette’s victims: “He hadn’t meant to speak as [Whitman]. He never did, but when he was excited he couldn’t help himself.” The slightest stimulus can force them to a bardic declamation. When one character derides a piece of junk, another is quick to reply that “What is commonest and cheapest and nearest and easiest is Me.” A friend is greeted, “I celebrate myself, and what I assume you shall assume. How was your night?”

In the most successful of the novellas, the nineteenth-century ghost story, the Whitmania seems the least strained. In the weeks following the death of his brother Simon in a grisly factory accident, Lucas finds succor in Whitman’s verses: “All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses, / And to die is different from what anyone supposed, and luckier.” When Lucas takes Simon’s place in the factory, Whitman’s stories of laborers seem designed for him (although it is, of course, the other way around). But in the other stories, characters turn almost unfathomably to the poet, offering explanations that never quite convince. In the science-fiction plot, an android named Simon has a malfunctioning “poetry chip.” In the police thriller, a child, who comes to be called Luke, has been brainwashed by a Whitman-venerating terrorist cell. He recites Whitman because—like an android—“a concept trips a wire, and he’s got the line, but he hasn’t got the circuitry to make sense of it. He’s like a vessel for someone else’s wishes.” This “someone,” of course, is Cunningham himself. He has grafted Whitman’s verses onto his characters, but not sufficiently tightly, and the grafting shows.

Insofar as novelists have always written about real people, stuffing other

Deborah Friedell

Same Old, Same Old

SPECIMEN DAYS: A NOVEL
By Michael Cunningham
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
308 pp., \$25)

WHITMAN PRO-nounced his autobiography, *Specimen Days*, to be “the most wayward, spontaneous, fragmentary book ever printed.” Do the adjectives fit Michael Cunningham’s new book, also titled *Specimen Days*? Fragmentary it certainly is. The book is pointedly subtitled “a novel,” but it is really three distinct novellas, set approximately a hundred years apart, in the styles of a Victorian ghost story, a contemporary police procedural, and a

futuristic science-fiction episode. As a gesture toward formal unification, each contains a man (or android) called Simon, a boy called Lucas or Luke, and a woman (or alien female) called Catherine, Cat, or Catareen. Each takes place in Manhattan, and metropolitan particulars—a bowl, a music box, Central Park’s Bethesda Fountain—float through all three. The guiding spirit is, ostensibly, Whitman, whose verse is recited on nearly every page of the book and who makes an appearance in the first novella. The novel’s epigraph, from Whitman’s invocation to the Muse in *Leaves of Grass*, becomes Cunningham’s anthem: “truly new ways and days receive, surround you / . . . And yet the same old human race, the same within, without.”

people's ideas and conversation into their texts, perhaps no writer is immune to charges of freeloading. Yet writers who take as their subject the work of other writers, who fill their novels with already published words, seem to be working in a new genre. This type of fiction is booming, with other recent examples including novels and plays about Christopher Marlowe, A. E. Housman, C. S. Lewis, Henry James, and Sylvia Plath. In constructing their fictions (or demi-fictions), writers blend their own words with those of their subjects—parasitically or reverentially, depending on your point of view. The most famous example of this genre is Cunningham's previous novel, *The Hours*, which became a best-seller, received a Pulitzer, and was turned into a movie that won Nicole Kidman an Academy Award for her portrayal of Virginia Woolf. One of its narrative strands—like *Specimen Days*, it contains three different stories set in different time periods—is a modern re-telling of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Although *The Hours* was read by tens of thousands who would not have thought to pick up *To the Lighthouse* or *The Waves*, Cunningham's readers did briefly make *Mrs. Dalloway* a best-seller for the first time, apparently because they were curious about the original Mrs. Dalloway, the one who does not live with her lesbian partner and their daughter by artificial insemination.

At their best, novels about real writers can offer insights denied to the mere literary critic, who must traffic only in known facts. Colm Tóibín took the existing biographies of Henry James together with everything he had read by James and created a narrative structure to organize them. Although you would not wish Tóibín's *The Master* to be the only book written about James, it was able to provide a more forceful psychological portrait of the writer than almost anything that had come before it. Cunningham ostentatiously credits more than twenty historical and literary studies on Woolf in his acknowledgments for *The Hours*, but finally his interest in the writer seems limited to her iconhood: the pensive photograph of her in profile by G. C. Beresford that English majors hang in their dorm rooms next to some Klimt reproduction.

THE *HOURS* BEGINS WITH Woolf's suicide, and one suspects that the suicide interests Cunningham more than any-

thing else in her biography. When the novel appeared, many found easy ways to quibble about Woolf's portrait: we see Woolf kissing her sister on the lips, being mean to the servants, obsessed by death, encompassing all the neuroses of a great female writer—but although she is one of the twentieth century's most interesting readers, she is never shown thinking about any writer other than herself. (A collection of Woolf's influential critical essays, *The Common Reader*, was published the same year as *Mrs. Dalloway*.) *The Hours* is far less useful for what it claimed about Woolf than for its keen, if melodramatic, examination of how her writings affect the people who read them, whose lives are changed by them.

The most original section of *The Hours* is the strand featuring a suburban housewife in 1949 who, through her reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, realizes that she has been living the wrong life, and decides to leave her husband and child. For Cunningham believes in the power of literature to make things happen. In *Specimen Days*, Whitman's poetry has use-value. The android's creator endowed him with the poetry chip so that he would become "better able to appreciate the consequences of [his] actions." In the ghost story, Whitman serves as both grief counselor and motivational speaker. In the police procedural, a black policewoman greets her white boyfriend's claim that he's never read Whitman by thinking, "Of course you haven't. You're Cedar Rapids. You're Cornell and a Harvard MBA. Your people don't do poetry. They don't need to." In *Specimen Days*, Whitman is exclusively for the down-and-out, who cry, "I am large, I contain multitudes" when they feel threatened.

CUNNINGHAM IS INTENT ON teaching his readers about the American bard, and he is willing to sacrifice the usual niceties of literary fiction to do so. In the police story, in order to crack the Whitman-venerating terrorists, a forensic psychologist investigating their bombings enlists the aid of a Whitman scholar from New York University to help her learn "a thing or two about Mr. Whitman." To Cunningham's credit, he labors to integrate the professor into his narrative. He has a gift for writing about female characters, although he does not always exercise it: the professor, though a small part, seems fully imagined. But her teachings are cloyingly transparent as a vehicle for

the reader's edification, as the professor lectures us that "Whitman as you probably know was the first great American visionary poet" and that "he spent his life, and it was a long life, extending and revising *Leaves of Grass*. He published it himself. The first edition appeared in 1855. There were nine editions in all. The last, which he called his deathbed edition, appeared in 1891." And so on.

With *The Hours*, Cunningham was in good form as a stylist. His expositions were gentle: we learned about his subjects by watching them. No English professor was needed to say, "As you may recall, (Adeline) Virginia Stephen was born in 1882 at Hyde Park Gate." In *Specimen Days*, the subtlety is no more. Cunningham relies clumsily on his professor to explain how his novellas are thematically coherent with Whitman's philosophy and with one another: "Whitman empathized with everyone. In Whitman there are no insignificant lives. There are mill owners and mill workers, there are great ladies and prostitutes, and he refuses to favor any of them. He finds them all worthy and fascinating. He finds them all miraculous." Just like Michael Cunningham!

But Cunningham goes further: while Whitman sings about his own time, Cunningham sings for all people in all times in all genres, from nineteenth-century factory workers and twentieth-century suicide bombers to the future's lizard-like aliens. He out-Whitmans Whitman. And he finds that these people are all the same, "faces and hearts the same, feelings the same, yearnings the same." They even have the same names. The problem is that there is no justifying logic for all the repeating names and objects, and on their own they signify very little. They become inside jokes, drawing attention only to their own artifice.

In each of the three stories, a different member of the trio engages in an incredible act of sacrifice out of love for one of the others: "Hymns to the universal God from universal man—all joy!" But the sacrifices are less meaningful to us than perhaps Cunningham intends, as his characters seem to have no more control over their actions than they do over the Whitman they cannot help reciting. (Fictional characters do not actually have autonomy, of course, but usually they have to be written as though they do.) In the police story, Cat gives up everything—career, boyfriend, apartment, possessions—in order to flee New York with one of the brainwashed child terrorists,

who she fears will otherwise be imprisoned despite his youth. Hitherto she has been a model of professionalism, and she has known the child for less than a day—so Cunningham quickly inserts into the narrative that Cat once had a son, Luke, who died as a child. On hearing about him, the child terrorist renames himself Luke—thereby replacing the son and therefore explaining why Cat gives up so much for him. But nothing about Cat seems to reflect a woman who has lost her child, and so the explanation feels pat. As a result, Cunningham's overarching argument of man's universalism refuses to go down: yes, indeed, all characters can act alike if a writer wills it so.

SPECIMEN DAYS AIMS TO SERVE as a marriage of literature and criticism—as with *The Hours*, Cunningham pedantically lists his sources in the acknowledgments—and so it becomes fair to ask: how good a reader of Whitman is he? In the police procedural, the adult leading the child suicide bombers explains that she raised them on Whitman because “Whitman was the last great man who really and truly loved the world.” And we are meant to understand that Whitman's cosmic uncritical love of the world—which includes love for evildoers, “for the wicked just the same as the righteous”—should complicate our reverence of the poet. The professor informs us that “Whitman simply loved what *was*,” and the forensic psychologist reports back to her colleague, “It seems you could interpret him as some sort of voice for the status quo. As in, if you worked at some awful job in a factory, twelve hours a day, six days a week, here was Whitman to tell you that your life was great, your life was poetry.” And we know that the psychologist must be right, because in the first novella the child factory worker indeed finds solace in *Leaves of Grass*.

There is much in Whitman that seems almost unforgivably time-bound—say, his support of the Fugitive Slave laws and dislike of abolitionists—but surely the Whitman who speaks to us from both his journalism and his poetry is hardly a “sort of voice for the status quo.” Although Whitman can sometimes seem to sentimentalize labor, he has no illusions about the vileness of urban factory life. In his recent biography of Whitman, David S. Reynolds points out that the poet's radical egalitarianism could make him “sound like Karl Marx or George

Lippard when he depicted the grotesque rich.” In the “Myself and Mine” section of *Leaves of Grass*—it is not recited by Cunningham's characters—the poet cries: “Let others praise eminent men and hold up peace, I hold up agitation and conflict.” He hates those who profit from exploiting workers, writing of the “many sweating, ploughing, thrashing, and then chaff for payment receiving, / A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.” And he hates the politicians who make such exploitation possible, the “swarms of cringers, suckers, doughfaces, lice of politics, planners of sly involutions for their own preferment to city offices or state legislatures or the judiciary or congress or the presidency.” Cunningham's professor is right to call Whitman a “visionary poet,” except that Whitman was a visionary for a reason: he did not always praise things as they were, but as how he thought that they should be.

Cunningham's professor lectures us, rather banally, on Whitman's range: “Was he writing about industrialization? Yes, he was. Was he writing about the family? Certainly. And he was also writing about

logging and sex and westward expansion. You can go at him from just about any angle.” What is Cunningham to do with such an uncategorizable, overdetermined, oceanic writer? The professor says that Whitman “didn't just celebrate himself. He celebrated everybody and everything.” And so Cunningham has tried to write about everything, too. His ghost story, set in a miserable factory, will show us Cunningham's censure of industrialization. Sex and the family, too, are accounted for. Westward expansion? An android and an alien flee New York and head to Colorado. Only the logging seems to be missing. And Cunningham dutifully includes all the things that Whitman surely would have written about had he lived today: September 11 and terrorism, Harvard MBAs, interstellar travel, the soulless modern office with its late-day, bottom-of-the-pot coffee sludge. It is a testament to the faith that we place in the novel that we sometimes think that it can do everything at once. But everything is a very big subject. Michael Cunningham's imagination is not as vast as Whitman's, and his talents are no match for so many multitudes. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

tive has much to offer business. It's telling that his letter doesn't make the value of such a perspective any clearer.

RED HERRING

LAURENCE F. KAPLAN'S DIARIST IS refreshing after a year of simplistic regionalism on the left (“Turning Red,” May 2 & 9). It's time for those of us on the left to recognize that not everyone in a red state is a fundamentalist, and, more crucially, to shed our reputation as the uncritical advocates of modernity. We shouldn't shy away from things like gay rights or the right to abortion, but we also shouldn't dismiss legitimate concerns out of cultural snarkiness or regional animosity.

COLIN NEWMAN

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

IN HIS COMMENTARY ON THE “RED state” conservatives among whom he now lives in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, Kaplan critiques the assumption of some liberals that something must be wrong when people vote against their economic interests. He's right that “cast-

ing a vote that transcends selfish interests is one of the hallmarks of a mature democracy.” But Kaplan just skips over the essential question: Do these red-state voters who support politicians—who facilitate the economic trends that are rending their world—*know* that they are voting against their own economic interests? It would be one thing for people to knowingly decide to place their values—on abortion, say, or gay rights—ahead of self-interest. But it is something else entirely if, by virtue of a skillful political con job, they're unaware of the nature of the choice they're making. As someone who has lived in the Shenandoah Valley, I think that the Thomas Frank version is much closer to the truth: By and large, these good people do not understand the true nature and impact of the political forces that have won their support. I invite Kaplan to ask his neighbors some questions to see if they know what the defenders of the unborn and the sanctity of marriage have done about shifting the tax burden, funding programs to retrain displaced workers, the rising costs of health care, or a host of other issues that touch their personal well-being.

ANDREW BARD SCHMOOKLER

Albuquerque, New Mexico

RIO DE JANEIRO DIARIST Brazilian Whacks

CCOURT PROCEEDINGS ARE underway in the case of the worst massacre in the history of Rio de Janeiro state. As a journalist, I'm not supposed to have a stake in what happens, but I'm anxious nonetheless. Whenever one of the suspects in the case is rattled by the judge's questioning, there's always a cop nearby to offer him a comforting pat on the shoulder. The eleven suspects accused of mass murder are cops themselves; the dozen men guarding the courtroom are colleagues. Here, in the Baixada Fluminense, the working-class suburbs north of Rio, it often seems that rule by cops has replaced rule of law. And, while the testimony I've heard makes me reasonably sure that at least some of the accused are guilty, I'm also worried that history is in their favor, and the killer cops could go unpunished.

RIO'S STATE POLICE FORCE, ESPECIALLY in the Baixada, has long harbored cops who moonlight on murder-for-hire execution squads. Earlier this year, police officials attempted a crackdown on corruption among the battalions here, starting with a shuffling of commands. The blowback was ugly. On March 30, a group of officers tossed a severed head over a police barracks fence. Yet not until the following evening did anything happen to really shock the residents of Rio. Beginning at about 8:30 p.m., a second gang of suspected police toured the Baixada. They fired police-issue pistols at bars, car washes, bicyclists on a highway overpass, and someone waiting at a bus stop, murdering 29 people. Many of the victims were teenagers; four boys were killed playing pinball. Only two of the victims had previous criminal records.

THE KILLERS DID LITTLE TO HIDE THE fact that they were police. As a sort of signature of their training, they left few bullet marks on walls, dispatching several of their victims with a single shot to the back of the skull. They were wild yet methodical, and the atrocity seemed carefully calculated to show just how ruthless the dirty elements of the force would be in defending their turf.

AMONG THE SUSPECTS, THE MOST FRIGHTENING may be 31-year-old Carlos Jorge Carvalho. Soon after his arrest, he was also named in the 2001 killing of six teenagers. (His alleged motive: The kids were always smoking weed out in the open, annoying the neighbors.) As for his official record, Carvalho has killed three people for "resisting arrest." He is a tall, thick-necked jock, and, as he was led into the courtroom, he greeted his attorney with a wide grin and, although handcuffed, two thumbs up. He opted to stand rather than sit as he related his alibi to the judge, bouncing from foot to foot with the fidgety energy of a boy who wanted to go out and play. At least two witnesses have fingered Carvalho for the recent massacre. He apparently didn't wear a mask as he put 13 bullets into one man. Maybe he assumed witnesses would be too scared to turn him in.

THAT, ANYWAY, IS HOW IT USUALLY GOES. Witnesses are such a scarce commodity in the Baixada that less than 10 percent of murders are ever solved. Killing rarely has consequences. It is an easy solution rather than a last resort, both for drug traffickers and for the police officers attempting to eliminate them. Some three million people live here, and the annual homicide body count—about 2,000—resembles the harvest of war.

THE MOST MEMORABLE CRIMES IN RIO have been committed by cops. In 1993, some 30 suspected police and associates murdered 21 people in a Rio favela. It was supposedly revenge for the killing of four police officers, but it was exacted on random slum-dwellers. Only seven of those involved in the massacre would be condemned to prison.

WILL THE COURT BE ABLE TO HANDLE the current case? Even by the standards of Brazil, the Baixada has a reputation for shadowy dealings and twisted justice. When these pretrial hearings opened, relatives of the victims, wearing black masks, staged a protest outside the prosecutor's office. They have been desperately campaigning to federalize the case, to get it out of local hands. To her credit,

the judge has taken steps to ensure witnesses aren't scared away. She has devised a sort of *burqa* to hide witnesses while they identify alleged murderers. The judge often drapes the witnesses herself. Once she used what looked like a hairclip to fasten the fabric. But there was little she could do about the death threats several of the witnesses have received, including some reportedly dialed in from cell phones that suspects somehow got their hands on while incarcerated.

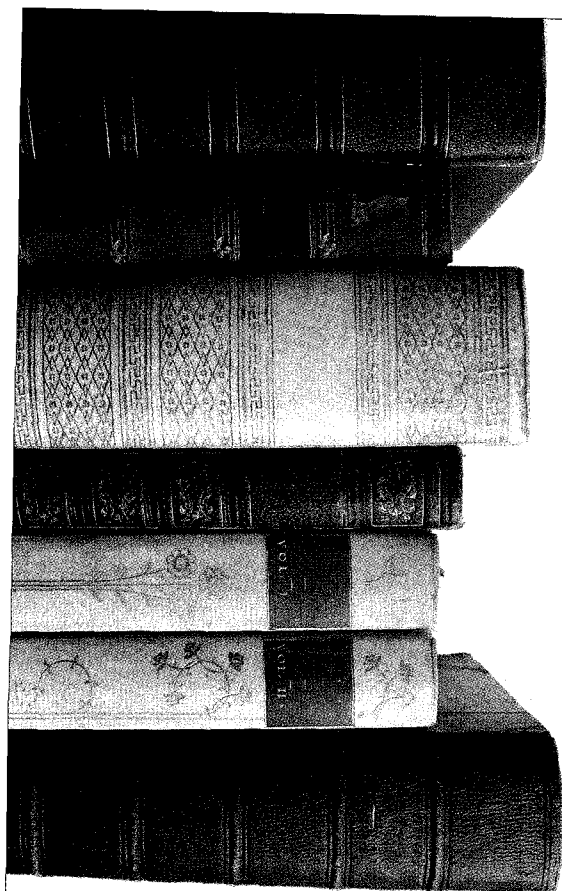
THIS CASE REACHED THE COURTHOUSE because the killers went too far, but a single trial is unlikely to diminish the police's outsized share of the city's carnage. Last year, nearly 1,000 people were killed in confrontations with Rio police. That was more than triple the figure from just five years ago. (It was also about triple the number of justifiable homicides committed by police in the entire United States in an average year.) Forensic evidence points to summary executions.

IT HAPPENS BECAUSE PEOPLE WINK AT it. For decades now, Brazil's police have been given a free hand to eliminate undesirables by whatever informal means necessary, so their contribution to the hyper-violence goes unremarked. But vigilante cops also tend to be dirty cops, and they are frequently entangled in protection rackets, kidnapping schemes, and drug-trafficking. I imagine the cycle of violence will end when good cops decide to turn in dirty ones, but I'm not sure the rank-and-file can summon the outrage to risk it.

FIVE DAYS AFTER THE SHOOTINGS, I interviewed two Rio cops. The first worked in the Baixada, in a unit that investigated crimes by police. Yet he had little to offer—just a ritualized complaint that officers murdered in the line of duty never get this kind of press. The second cop was only slightly less blasé, and only when pressed did he mutter a possible explanation for the massacre. "You have people who kill every day," he said. "You have people, if they have the opportunity to kill, will kill." It was a verbal shrug. Both men refused to believe the victims were what state security officials said they were: innocents.

DAVID MORTON

David Morton recently returned from Rio de Janeiro.



Hemingway
Woolf
DuBois
Faulkner
Ellison
Nabokov
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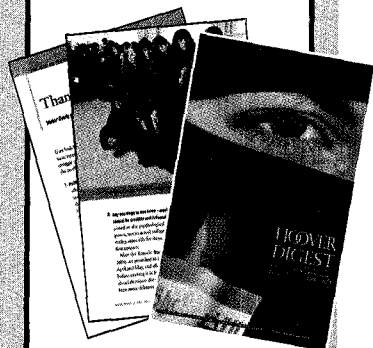
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Popular Mobilization and Political Crisis in Bolivia

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The recent collapse of the traditional political party system as a result of popular protests and mobilizations in Bolivia is a new phenomenon in Latin America. Unlike Ecuador and Venezuela, where corruption of the traditional political class caused the regime collapses, **the change in Bolivia is due to demands for new types of representation by Amerindian and regional groups.**

This movement dates back to the Bolivian National Revolution of 1952, which granted universal suffrage, political legitimacy, land, and arms to the Indian peasants. For two generations, these peasants were a passive support group to all governments—both civilian and military—as long as the government in power delivered education, social services, and land titles to the communities.

The demands of the current generation of Amerindians go beyond local community concerns to include everything from preferential quotas to the nationalization of natural resources. The members of the dominant group in this movement are the *cholos*, who are defined as bilingual, educated, and mostly urban Amerindians. Many dress in traditional clothing and demand formal acceptance of a multiethnic state.

After the creation of more than three hundred new municipal governments in 1995, and the recognition of citizen groups and Indian pueblos as autonomous political parties in 2002, both new local leaders and reformed older politicians have emerged to replace the three parties that dominated national politics for more than twenty years. The recent protests over foreign companies' control over water

systems in Cochabamba and El Alto and the debate over control of the nation's gas reserves have led to blockades of major cities and increasing demands for a decentralized state. The traditional elite has tried to negotiate these often incoherent, racist, and threatening demands with promises of constitutional reform and greater participation.

Currently, Evo Morales and his socialist party, MAS, have emerged as the most important new force. He first appeared as leader of coca farmers in the Chapare region against the U.S.-sponsored coca eradication campaigns. Although he has incorporated several highland Amerindian movements into his party, he needs the support of the Spanish middle class to go beyond the 20 percent of the vote he won in the last presidential election. Along with the popular mobilizations in the highlands, strong regionalism is also emerging in Santa Cruz under the leadership of large commercial agricultural landowners who are demanding popularly elected state legislatures and governors and greater control over their gas fields.

As Bolivia prepares for a new constitutional assembly in the upcoming months, there will be calls for abolishing the traditional centralist state and for corporate representation of communities and popular groups in the legislature alongside traditional elected representatives. Whether civil society will move in this direction depends on the willingness of both sides to negotiate. Although there is no guarantee that such negotiations will occur, the alternative would involve violence and repression on a scale unseen in Bolivia since the early 1980s.

—Herbert S. Klein

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